LAND OF MOONSHINE

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LAND OF MOONSHINE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS

DUST AND LAURELS
A PASTORAL PLAYED OUT
THREE COMELY MAIDS
AN ENGLISHMAN
MUSK OF ROSES
THE SECRET OF THE DRAGON
ALL WE, LIKE SHEEP
DAISY THE MINX
LILY MAGIC
THE MEMOIRS OF MIMOSA
AT LAVENDER COTTAGE
PHYLLIDA FLOUTS ME
STAR OF THE MORNING
PLAIN JILL
THE SECRET SYMPATHY
THE SILENT BATTLEFIELD

IN COLLABORATION

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SINS OF THE FATHERS (with MARK MELFORD)
THE SKIRTS OF EDEN (with RAYMOND MURRAY)
HIS ABSOLUTE "SHALL" (with E. G. ROBIN)

BIOGRAPHY

THE FAIR QUAKER AND HER RELATIONS WITH GEORGE III

ESSAYS

THE BOOK OF COMMON JOYS
THE TRUTH ABOUT MAN

ANTHOLOGIES

IN MY GARDEN (with ALICE STRONACH)
MY BABY

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

TO LUNILAND WITH A MOON GOBLIN
IN A CARAVAN

LAND OF MOONSHINE

BY

MARY L. PENDERED

Sith none that breatheth living aire does know
Where is that happy land of Faery
Which I soe much doe vaunt.—SPENSER.

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What is the Land of Moonshine?
It is the paradise of fools who dream
And vow that things are never what they seem,
And live romance, and hold in great esteem
The dear delights of Moonshine.

LAND OF MOONSHINE

CHAPTER I

I

It was a fancy of my childhood that pearls were fragments of the moon dropped upon our earth on moonlight nights. My mother laughed at the fancy and did not discourage it. When I asked her if she had found the pearls in her ring under the clump of big white lilies by the wall, she only laughed and said I was a clever darling to guess that. So then I was sure; and once they found me out in the garden, long after I had been put to bed, looking for moon pearls. I sometimes wonder if I have ever quite outgrown the fancy; whether I am not still looking for moon pearls.

We were very happy children, the four of us, three boys and a girl, living in a queer world of our own, created by our vivid imaginations, fed by unrestrained reading. I suppose most children have their quaint fancies and dwell in them, more or less; but I think ours were exuberant. For they disconcerted and somewhat frightened our juvenile friends. There were strange things all about us and

our little world was set, like an island, in a sea of enchanted mystery. When our companions were informed, with a breathless intensity due to truth only, that witches and goblins and savage monsters crouched behind the woodshed, they quailed before us; and to them it was impossible to become Red Indians on a prairie, or bloodthirsty pirates on a rolling ship, or knights jousting in a tournament at a moment's notice, as we could. To us the magic transformation was as easy as lying.

In the twinkling of an eye we were no longer George and Vincent, Val and Clive, but those same Indians, pirates or knights, with all their characteristics, as we conceived them; and I well remember the violent rage into which I was thrown when a matter-of-fact girl, my own particular chum, denied that I was King Arthur and flouted my sword, Excalibur. "You're only pretending, silly," she said contemptuously, and I lunged at her with that wooden sword till she howled for mercy and ran screaming to my mother, while I was sent to bed in a flood of tears.

My conception of King Arthur must have been a crude one, for I longed to assuage my outraged majesty by injuring the impious wretch.

How I loved that wooden sword! It was simply a lath of wood driven through a hole in a small wooden slab, forming the guard of the handle. I used to lay it by my bed at night, to ward off evil spirits; for was it not a magic sword and consecrated?

But we grew up and our enchanting games ceased. The boys went to a public school and I was left disconsolate. I went to the only girls' school in the town and learnt there all they had to teach, for my mother would not let me leave her side. From the Parish Church organist I learnt how to play the piano and how *not* to sing. His vocal lessons did my voice irreparable injury, as I know now. But few persons knew any better then, and it was a common belief that a man who could play an organ could teach any branch of the musical art. He did, however, ground me well in harmony and counterpoint, for which I have since been grateful, and I had good lessons in voice production later on. Classes for French and German completed my somewhat scrappy education. But if my studies were scant, I read omnivorously. My father and mother loved books and valued ideas. They had amassed an excellent library in which we children browsed continually. Our imaginations were, perhaps, a little over-fed. And very early in girlhood I began to build up romances of my own, on the lines set by Scott and Jane Porter, gliding away alone to do so and longing for hours of solitude when I might escape from the prosaic real to the exciting unreal world of my own vivid fancy.

I called it ' telling myself stories,' but in those stories I was myself the thinly disguised heroine, philandering blissfully through idealistic love affairs, revelling in scenes of beauty and dramas of romantic action. Round and round our large garden, and

along the country roads I meandered, in these delightful dreams, seeing and hearing nothing but the faces and voices of those enchanting ghosts that haunted my mind.

Then I fell in love, gloriously, overwhelmingly.

He was a married man and I knew it; but that only made the affair more poignantly exquisite and romantic. I thought I had found my moon pearl then, and abandoned myself to a beautiful, entirely spiritual, passion which I fondly expected the object of my adoration to share. When I discovered his quite different, and to me revolting, conception of the situation, I was first stunned, then utterly disillusioned. It was a reversal of the old fairy tale, for the splendid prince turned suddenly into the hideous monster. I thought my heart shattered beyond repair, and brooded so much upon this catastrophe that I fell ill of it. Nobody guessed what was the matter with me. My father muttered 'hysteria' and our old doctor accounted for my pallor and the shedding of sudden tears by another word, 'anæmia.' He gave me a tonic and I was taken to the sea, whence I returned cured of my green-sickness, but full as ever of dreams and fancies.

II

Life and death conspired to knock some of the nonsense out of me before I was twenty. Death took away my perfect mother and the cares of a household fell upon my young shoulders. God

knows how I detested those cares, that incessant thinking of little things that mean so much to the comfort of a home. The ordering of commodities, the catering, the constant supervision of servants in a warfare against dirt and dust, must absorb all the time and thought of a housewife who does her duty properly, where the family is not small. I am afraid mine was performed very perfunctorily, though I honestly tried to do my best and to give up day-dreaming.

George went in to our father's business and married. Vincent qualified in the Law and went into partnership with a man in Northumberland. Clive went into the Navy. I missed him most, though he was, of course, only a boy when he went to the training ship. But we were always pals, being the two youngest, and also alike in many ways. Clive and I used to tell stories to each other.

For some years I lived happily enough with my father. We had in common a love of books; that quick perception of the droll which we call a sense of humour. It is, perhaps, the dominant note in family harmony, for it is difficult to quarrel without becoming absurd, and a consciousness of absurdity evokes a laugh. My father and I could generally bridge over mutual exasperations with a laugh.

III

But he died too, when I was twenty-six, and I found myself homeless. George brought his wife and small family to live in the old house and invited me to stay on with them, but I knew better than to do that. No young wife wants a sister-in-law in her house, and I loved Elsie far too well to risk any strain in our friendly relations. Moreover, I did not want to live with them. I was eager to go out into the world, seek adventure and find my own special niche.

My father left me a hundred and twenty pounds a year, securely invested; a fully sufficient income for any female person, according to the notion of fathers in his day, who thought that if a woman did not secure a husband to provide for her, that duty must necessarily fall upon her nearest male relations. No doubt he intended to be generous; but the amount was not much more than he had allowed me for pin money and I was naturally appalled at the prospect of having to live on it. The house I had come to regard as a superior kind of prison, confining me within domestic bounds and withholding me from the freer life I most desired, now took on a halo of its own, and seemed the most desirable place on earth. I hated to leave it, to hand it over to another woman, and my heart sank very low the day I left its dear shelter for the open world of chance.

At first I travelled abroad and enjoyed the sense

of novelty which is so refreshing and stimulating. But I soon found that my income would not permit me to travel luxuriously or stay at the best hotels, and I hated cheap hotels. We had all been brought up to hate cheapness and ugliness. Most of all I loathed having to worry over the tips to hotel servants, and to give them less than they expected. A look of disappointment or contempt seemed to wither my very soul. This spoilt my pleasure in travel, and I finally resolved never to go abroad again unless I came into a fortune, or married a rich man.

IV

In spite of my small economies, I spent so much time in France and Belgium that it was necessary to find a cheap lodging in England at the end of my first year alone, and I found one in the country, at a farmhouse, where dwelt, I really believe, the meanest people on earth. They gave me, and their other unfortunate 'paying guests,' food we could hardly swallow, skim milk, stale eggs, tough and nasty bacon. They made us feel that we were only welcome as golden geese, and for the gold we paid they gave us as little as we could be induced to accept.

Still, I might have endured the life there if it had not been so deadly dull, so utterly devoid of any interesting communion: or if the farmer and his wife had shown some kindness to my sole

companion, my dear Pomander, whose gentleness, beauty and grace usually commended him to every one. He is a cat of great distinction, a dark, short-haired tabby with immaculate manners and an ornament to any household. But they grudged him his food and milk, and for his sake I actually became a thief. When their backs were turned I stole fragments of meat for him—and am not ashamed to confess it!

On his account chiefly I quitted the farm after three months, but my next experiences were little better. They are not worth recording. I need but say that two years of life as a 'paying guest' reduced me to a condition bordering on despair and I began to wonder if I could go on existing. I projected many plans for earning money, but they came to nothing. Only one desire possessed me at this time, a desire very common to women, and that was a home of my own. It seemed, however, an impossible dream, an unattainable Paradise. For how establish a home on £120 a year? One knows, of course, that thousands of people keep house on that, or less than that, but I could not imagine how they did it. And when I looked at tiny cheap cottages in out-of-the-way districts, they appalled me by their insanitary discomfort, their odours, their stuffiness, and, worst of all, their neighbourhoods. I could not tolerate the thought of living in one of them.

I was sinking into the depths of hopelessness when something happened that dispelled the fog in

my soul and opened a new life before me. It was as unhoped for as unexpected.

During the loneliness and misery of my wandering from one boarding-house to another, I sought some comfort from within and tried to write. I wrote short stories and verses, and although they were mostly unsuccessful, I did, now and again, meet with some encouragement, and a few odd guineas. Then I turned my attention to song-writing, and set one of my lyrics to music. While at home I had written a waltz and a song which my father had had printed, with some pride; but now, of course, I could not afford to pay for printing. The song went to several publishers and I had given up hope of ever seeing it in print when a letter came from a publisher accepting it and offering me a small—very small—royalty. It came out, but I got no royalty, for nobody bought it. My poor little baby song lived only to die.

Or so it seemed. But there must have been a spark of life in its plaintive sentimentality, for—wonderful to relate—it was found one day by a famous singer, who chanced to like it, and to find that it suited her voice. She took it and tried it on the public. The dear public loved it, and encored it. She sang it everywhere and other singers followed her lead. I shall never forget the thrill of seeing one day, in a newspaper, the words: "Madame Patty Lind will sing the charming new song *Jasmine Nights* at the King's Hall on the 11th inst." Until then I had no idea what had

happened. But immediately afterwards a letter came from the publishers containing a cheque and request for another song, on the same lines. Thereafter one seldom took up a programme of popular music without seeing *Jasmine Nights* by V. M. Prescott in it, and the reprints went into many thousands. Amateurs bought it as fast as copies could be signed; street pianos began to grind it out of their terrible insides; gramophone records of it, by public singers, were sold everywhere; bands played it. Money came from it to me regularly; even my tiny royalty brought in hundreds of pounds. The publishers clamoured for more and printed with feverish haste those songs I had written in happier times and laid aside as failures. None of these was quite so successful as the first, but I had larger royalties on their sales, which were sufficient to bring in considerable money; and, in little over a year, I was able to invest several thousand pounds.

It all seems like a dream now—that shower of gold falling so unexpectedly from the heavens! But for that one strange spell of luck my song would never have been heard. If the famous soprano had not chanced to see the song lying somewhere; if the words had not attracted her and the melody pleased her; if the audience at her first public performance of it had not shown unmistakable approval, I should be still in the same condition as when I wrote it, going from boarding-house to boarding-house, probably, and growing

soured with the years. On what queer chances our fate depends! A few months after my third song decorated concert programmes, the desire of my heart was fulfilled. I found my longed-for haven, a moon pearl, my home!

CHAPTER II

I

For months I sought in vain the ideal home of my fancy. The desirable residences so gloriously painted in advertisements proved sad disillusions, obvious emanations from the Father of Lies. I began to despair of my fellow-creatures, as well as of ever finding a house, and my journeys here and there into different counties became weary pilgrimages, with little hope to lighten them, until one day I chanced to see advertised a house whose name held enchantment. For it was called 'Shepherd's Delight,' and suggested lovely pastoral things. The fact that it lay in Northamptonshire somewhat damped my ardour, for I had set my heart on Kent or Surrey; but I went to view it, and the first glance was enough. I knew that I had found my home.

Indeed, as we drove through the village of Woodside, my sap began to rise and hope to burgeon. For it was a charming village on a hill, rising to the left of the high road to Meadborough, one of those green-bordered roads so common to the Midlands, with great elms and beeches, oaks and ashes marking the way in tall hedges, and broad strips of grass edging the grey road on either side. The village

seemed to hide in a wood, like a village in a fairy tale, its narrow roads winding up between trees and old walls, haystacks and thatched houses to the church, whose weathercock, above all the green, caught the sunlight in glints of gold. I felt a strange sense of intimacy and adoption as we threaded our way upward slowly. The village was to be mine. I knew it.

And the house! How shall I describe it soberly, when even now the thought of my first view intoxicates me? I knew then that love at first sight applies not only to the relation between men and women, but that a house can also storm the heart and work mysteriously on the mind. For the moment I saw the square chimney-stacks of Shepherd's Delight rising from its old red tiles, stained with centuries of lichen and house leek, it was as if hands were stretched out to me and a voice cried: "You have come at last! Long have I waited for you."

It was almost covered with tangled creepers from which the long latticed windows peered enquiringly, and stood in a neglected garden, where a few mezereon bushes sent up their purplish-pink spikes amid the lush green of grass and weeds. The agent apologised for its unkempt condition, and it certainly looked rather hopeless, but my spontaneous passion forgave all its sins and saw through ugliness to beauty, as love can. The flagged path from the gate to the house was long enough to minimise the road dust and noises, I thought, and quietude is

very dear to me. It was tufted with pushing little daisies, thyme, grass and weeds of various kinds, and some of these persistent interlopers, for all their softness, had shifted the flags and made the path uneven. The porch at the end of it was also of stone and roomy, with a seat on either side; honeysuckle, faintly green, was tangled about it. Two sentinels guarded it, two large evergreen shrubs, queerly shaped and twined with travellers' joy. I learnt afterwards that they were of juniper and had been fashioned to represent Adam and Eve, the Adam and Eve of our childish Noah's Ark, but had not been cut for a year or more.

They were at the head of a lavender hedge, equally untrimmed and broken in places, that ran at the back of two borders to the path; beyond which lay, on one side, the obvious intention of a rose garden; on the other a less obvious rock garden. And beyond these rose a hedge of yew, whose curious inequalities suggested that it, too, like the juniper trees, had once been clipped in fantastic battlements and turrets. The air was full of bird-song, for it was April, their bridal season, and happy, twittering gossip came from these hedges as we passed up the pathway to the porch.

There was a heavy old oaken door, and a step down from it into a small wainscoted hall that lay in darkness until the agent opened its shutters. Even then the light came feebly through the long low windows, obscured by jasmine and rose branches outside.

At one end was an ingle nook, with a modern but picturesque fireplace in it and a high-backed, broad-seated settle on either side, of old dark oak. The house had been advertised as 'partly furnished,' an addition to the lure of its name, as I did not know how far my means might stretch in the equipment of a house; and a gate-legged table, some odd chairs, of antique design, a grandfather clock and very funny old dresser, gave the hall a homely look in harmony with its beams and panels. Between the clock, in its corner near the ingle nook, and the dresser was a latched door, a step above the level of the room; and another, on the ground level, was set in the right-hand wall from the door; the former leading to the bedrooms upstairs, the latter into the rest of the house. There was a stone floor partly covered by thick cocoanut matting in dull reds and browns.

"This," said the agent, "was originally the bar parlour of the inn. You will observe——"

My exclamation interrupted him and he laughed.

"You didn't know it had been an inn, madam. But I hope that will not prejudice you against it, for it was a long time ago, and has been a private house for nearly a hundred years. It dates back to the sixteenth century, as you may judge from its architecture, but has been restored and improved till it is most commodious and——"

"I am not in the least prejudiced against it," I declared. "On the contrary, I am glad to know it was an inn, for that solves the mystery of its

name. I wondered why it was called Shepherd's Delight."

" It was ' The Shepherd's Delight ' in Cromwell's day. They say he spent a night here before Naseby, which is not far off; but it is only tradition, not authenticated. The owner, who is an artist, set much store by the legend. It was a sad business, his having to give up the place after he had spent so much on it."

I listened with as much sympathy as my impatience to see the rest of the house would permit while he gave me an account of my future landlord's illness and flight to a warmer, drier clime, and then, with a sudden sinking of the heart, I enquired :

" Isn't it healthy here? What about drains? "

He hastened to reassure me. The village had main drainage and was extremely healthy, standing on the crest of a hill, as it did. But Mr. Mills, the owner, was consumptive, and the keen air of the Midlands did not suit him. He went on to expatiate on the salubrity of the climate in these parts till I cut him short. To tell the truth, his words were waste of breath; for if he had told me that Woodside was the abode of all the dangerous microbes in existence and its climate the worst in England, I do not think it would have influenced me one jot. The glamour of the old house had overcome me so completely.

I drew a deep breath of delight when we had climbed the rather breakneck staircase leading through the latched door in the hall to the bedrooms

above, and I went into a large quaint chamber, with uneven floor and a ceiling that slanted down one side and was supported across the middle with a beam so low that the tall man with me could barely stand upright under it. The window curtains were drawn and from the casement I saw stretched before me a glorious view of emerald fields and new-budded trees, with a shining river twisted, like a silvery-blue ribbon, amid the green. A town lay in the far distance, the spire of its church mistily outlined above its dark roofs and tall factory chimneys; while here and there little white gleams in the hedgerows showed where the blackthorn was heralding spring with its dainty filigree blossoms, creeping about black boughs.

From the back windows another joy awaited me, for there I looked out upon a budding orchard, whose plum bloom was just beginning to break its green shells, and my imagination leaped to the faery scene it would present in a week or two. The orchard lay beyond a plot of lush, unshaven lawn, surrounded by a yew hedge. A yew alley led to it. I turned to the agent.

"I will take this house. When can I come in?"

"As soon as you please. We can have it tidied up and ready in a week, if you do not insist upon the garden being in order. That will be a work of more time. And the gates and out-buildings should have a coat of paint. The landlord is prepared to do that for a good tenant."

"The rent, you say, is sixty pounds a year, including the use of furniture?"

"Reasonable wear and tear," he smiled. "Yes, madam. It's absurdly cheap, of course, but the owner wishes to have it occupied, naturally; nothing is worse for a house than having it empty, especially through the winter."

A qualm of doubt beset me. The house had obviously been vacant for years. Was there something wrong with it?

I asked the question abruptly and it seemed to me that the agent looked a trifle disconcerted.

"There is nothing wrong with the house," he said, a little huffily. "The drains are in perfect order, as I've told you; the water supply is excellent. You can make further enquiries, if you like. But I can assure you——"

"Then why has it been empty so long?" I demanded suspiciously. "Surely such a treasure must have been snapped up before now if there were no sinister reason against it."

"So very few people care to live in an inland village," he said, evasively; "especially where there are no links or places of interest near. They prefer the sea."

I looked at him with what I intended to be a penetrating glance and asked abruptly:

"Is the house haunted?"

Do agents ever blush? I thought there appeared a deeper tone of brickdust on his already highly-coloured face. He certainly hesitated before replying.

" Well, I suppose every old house has its legend," he said. " It is bound to gather one, or more, during three or four centuries. But surely you do not attach any importance to foolish local superstitions."

" I'm afraid that is not the point. I do not want to do my own housework, and servants will not stay in a house reputed to be haunted. Be good enough to tell me the truth, that I may know where I am. Is there a ghost attached to the place, and are the villagers afraid to come near it after dark? "

" I can answer the last question to your satisfaction," he replied. I noted a tone of relief in his voice. " The foolish legend about the house is not in the least a terrifying one, and no one ever refused to serve the Mills on account of it. They lived here nearly ten years and kept their servants well."

" Then there is a ghost? "

" Well, hardly that. Only a nonsensical story about a shepherd who committed suicide for love in a stable at the back, and is said to be heard occasionally playing on his pipe. Nothing has ever been seen."

" How perfectly delicious! " He stared, and I went on: " That was all the old house needed to make it ideal; a gentle shepherd playing on a pipe. Are you sure you haven't made it up? "

He smiled and assured me that he had not, and we went over the rest of the premises together, each in a tranquil frame of mind. We examined the stable in which the shepherd was said to have hanged

himself three hundred years before, and it appeared just the right spot for such a tragedy. I glanced into its dark corners and up at the heavy beam from which he must have dangled, with an inward resolve never to go there after dark. I do not admit myself to be superstitious, but—my feeling was that of the ordinary agnostic, best expressed in the formula 'one never knows'! And however much one loves the creepy, curdling sensation of mysterious terror, one is disinclined to wander alone in the reputed haunts of the disembodied.

Beside the stable there were several outhouses: a laundry, a brew-house, with a great open fireplace in which one could stand and look up into the sky, a saddle-room, with hayloft above, and a small dairy. In the house I had been enchanted to find a large closet with shelves all round, known as the still-room, and I was told by the agent that the present bath-room had once been the spinning-room.

I am afraid I bored that agent, who was probably longing to get away to his tea. I wanted tea badly myself, but could not tear myself from the darling old house, the very house of my dreams, which, bathed in the waning sunlight, wooed me, like a wizard lover, to its arms.

II

The driver of the landau which had brought me from the station at Meadborough, four miles off,

was talking to a lady when we, at last, came out of the house.

She turned and came forward to meet me, with outstretched hand.

" I am sure you must be very tired," with a sweet and friendly smile. " May we give you a cup of tea before you go, or have you to catch a train? "

She shook hands with the agent, too, and included him in her invitation; also the coachman, whom she called ' Bob.' As my train back to town was not due for two hours, we accepted the offer of tea gladly, and the landau took us to the Bede House, the guests of Miss Felicity Heather, who had formerly, the agent informed me, owned Shepherd's Delight, *my house*, as I now called it to myself, proudly.

The Bede House showed itself to be as old, if not older, than that ancient hostelry, and stood well back from the road, near the church, behind high clipped hedges.

The carriage was taken round to the stables by ' Bob,' who had tea in the kitchen; I followed Miss Heather into a charming room looking out on a perfect constellation of daffodils, Lent lilies and other children of the spring set in a small pleasance of grass, enclosed by high walls and a part of the house. A great fire of logs burned in the grate, but the French window was open and the spring fragrance floated in to join that of the resinous burning wood. A tall woman nursing a large silver Persian cat rose from an armchair by the fire as we entered.

"My sister, Prudence," said Miss Heather, simply: "Prue, this is Miss Prescott. And you will be glad to hear that she has taken our dear old house. Won't it be delightful to have her for a neighbour?"

"It will indeed. Welcome, Miss Prescott. How do you do, Mr. Robins? I am sure you must both be ready for a cup of tea. I always think going over houses is such thirsty work. But you will like a wash first, I am sure. Felicity will take you upstairs and tea will be ready when you come down."

The cat still lay in her arms, blinking happily at me. On my way to the door I stopped to caress him.

"You beauty! You will put my poor plebeian in the shade," I said. "What is his name?"

"We call him Bulbul because he sings so beautifully," Miss Prudence said, laughing, "though I am afraid he would feel no compunction in eating his namesake if he could catch one."

"Oh, hush! We don't speak of that," her sister exclaimed. "It is not good manners to notice the naughty foibles of our friends, is it, Bulbul? Everyone has his faults."

I seemed to know her well from that remark. And I have never found reason to change my conclusion. In ten minutes I felt as much at home with these sweet ladies as if I had known them all my life.

That little tea-party at the Bede House will never be forgotten by me. Now that the Heathers are

my best-beloved friends I can only describe them by remembering how they appeared to me that afternoon in early April, in the perfect setting of their comfortable and characteristic room. Unlike the artist's home I had just quitted, with its somewhat affected colour schemes and attempts to combine old-time things with new ideas of artistic furnishing, the Heathers' house was frankly Victorian, of the best type. Its furniture was solid, its walls hung with papers whose old-fashioned flowers rambled among the gilt-framed pictures, and its thick carpets were likewise decorated with wreaths and floral designs. The large square table in the middle of this room was covered by a snowy cloth and set with a crystal bowl of early tulips, a silver tea service, and many good things to eat. Miss Prudence presided over it and her sister sat beside me, watching over my plate with a kind of tender solicitude.

I found it impossible to tell their ages. They were certainly older than myself, in that twilight time between the middle-aged and elderly which is, perhaps, a feature of to-day. Yesterday women were either old or young. At fifty our mothers wore caps and shawls and gave up all the pleasures supposed, then, to be the prerogative of youth. They sat by fires and knitted passively, content to fall into the backwaters of life. They seem to have been very happy and were, possibly, quite satisfied to be known as old ladies who had had their day and awaited the end of it. But now the cap and shawl

are banished; the woman of fifty goes gaily forth, in her short skirt and brogues, to play golf or croquet, drives her own car, plays bridge, dances and even flirts; or she occupies herself in public work and is respected for administrative ability. The Heathers were, one could plainly see, neither of the golf-playing nor magisterial type, but they were as young in spirit as I, highly vitalised, full of the zest of life and interested in a thousand things. I have spoken of the 'twilight time,' but it does not describe their state. They were still in the sunlight and helped to radiate it with their vivid personalities. One could hardly think of them as middle-aged, in the conventional sense of the word; certainly not as 'old.'

Felicity was the elder, but being fair and rather slender, did not show it. Her sister was darker and of stouter build. They had, I thought then, and still think, the kindest faces, the sweetest smiles, of any women I had ever known, and the most musical of voices.

I heard from them a good deal about the village of Woodside and its inhabitants. Every man, woman and child appeared of intimate concern to them, and they had the gift of interesting others in what they themselves were interested in, so that the kindly, humorous gossip did not bore one. I think it was because they kept outside it all; the personal connection was never obtruded. The hour between twilight and dusk flew quickly and I was sorry when the time came to go.

All the way home my thoughts swam in a golden haze. Had I not found a perfect trio of moon pearls in the quaint house, with its charming legend, the picturesque village and the two sisters who had given me such a cordial welcome to it? Over and over again I murmured to myself: What luck! what luck! what luck! until the words formed a refrain to the train's rhythmic jangle, and the telegraph posts, flying past, seemed to dance to its measure.

CHAPTER III

I

One of my regrets when I had to leave my old home was at parting from a servant who had been with us for ten years, or more. She had come to us, a very young girl, as housemaid and afterwards became cook. To her my thoughts had leaped with the first chance of taking a house, for she had always promised to come to me if I wanted her, and I certainly wanted her now.

Her reply to my letter was as follows :

" Dear Miss Val your letter was only wot I expected having known you was sure to have a home of your own someday which i'm delighted to here and will give a months notice at once and do all the work for you with plesure as I never was afrade of work you know so long as people is kind to me and not falt-finding, hoping I shall give you satisfaction and with love from respectfully Sally Sarah Green."

Her youth had been somewhat before Board School days and I knew the absence of punctuation was due to a difficulty she had always experienced with capital letters, which she indicated, as a rule,

by making small ones large. There were very few capitals in this letter. I answered by return of post and engaged Sally Sarah (we always called her Sally) to come to my Shepherd's Delight with me a month hence.

I had stored some furniture from the old home, a Turkey carpet, some Persian rugs, a fine old Sheraton book-case and all my treasured books—some hundreds of volumes. I had, too, some precious Jacobean chairs, a quantity of valuable old china and cut glass, a few good pictures and my dear Broadwood piano, a baby grand, given me by my father the year before he died. How I had missed it in these lonely, wandering years! The thought of having a home for my piano and my cat added greatly to my joy in it. For Sir Charles Pomander (so called for his elegance of form and manners) was not a welcome or a contented guest in boarding-houses and caused me many unhappy moments by wandering away from them and turning up his nose at their fare. I revelled in anticipation of his joyous freedom at Shepherd's Delight, and in being able to exercise my stiff, unpractised fingers.

It is unnecessary to describe my impatience for the day when I was to enter into my new domain. The weeks drawled by intolerably and seemed like months. But at last, when April stood upon the skirts of May, I found myself in the train with Sally (and Pomander in a basket) on my way to Meadborough and Woodside, surely one of the happiest creatures in the whole wide world.

II

It was a warm day for the time of year, the sun shining hotly on the carriage windows, and Sally, who was subject to lurid fancies, observed that it was just the sort of day on which she could imagine the Last Trump sounding and the graves all opening. She hoped, for my sake, that it wouldn't sound before I had entered into my new home, but that was how it felt to her. She had so often noticed that such Trumps, and other catastrophes of various kinds, came on days when the sun shone and everything seemed all right. But this gloomy foreboding did not seem to affect her spirits at all, and it certainly had no effect on mine.

In the hedges little pale green frills and fringes had taken the place of pearly sloe-blossom. I saw them swim past as I sat back, with half-closed eyes, in a state of dreamy content. I was going *home*, to a real home of my own, in which I should not have to say ' please ' or ' thank you ' for a cup of tea; and to a sojourner in dreary boarding-houses that was a sweet and welcome thought. For any natural woman, indeed, that word of four letters has a mysterious charm, although a charm of which she is often unconscious.

What was I going to do with myself all day long, in a sleepy village, with no occupation but looking after a house? The question had been asked by my oldest and best friend, Judith West, whose tremendous activities in public work filled me with admiration

—and horror. Do! I smiled to think of what I would do. The days could not be long enough for all I meant to do—the songs I meant to write, the books I meant to read, the music I meant to learn, the garden I meant to make. There was one thing, however, I had resolved *not* to do—worry about domestic affairs. The house should be handed over to Sally and left in her capable hands. She would enjoy the responsibility of running it and, I am sure, looked forward to her task with fully as much zest and longing as I felt for my piano, books and tranquil hours of thought.

When I answered thus the question of my friend she had returned me a characteristic note.

"All joy to you, my dear! I hope you may not soon tire of living in moonlight, under the spell of Enchanter's Nightshade, and find that books, music and flowers do not always make for contentment."

Dear old Judy! She doesn't understand. I laughed at her definitions of my mental state and revelled in the thought of Enchanter's Nightshade. It calls up a host of fascinating ideas and I wanted to write a song about it. She persists in regarding me as a dreamer living in a shadowy world of my own that one gust of real emotion would blow into nothingness; but I assure her that it is as real a world to me as that in which she lives—all woman's suffrage and education and eugenics and all manner of dry and nasty things; a kind of Augean stable

wherein she lays about her with a mop and feels like a female Hercules. It seems to make her very happy, but it would certainly poison me.

Miss Heather had written to ask me if she might go into my house and get tea ready for us on our arrival, an offer gratefully accepted; and there she was standing in the porch, as we drove up, in her soft grey Liberty gown and shady hat, making a homely picture. From that moment, if not before, I loved her. She had a fire lighted in the open ingle nook and the table drawn up to it; for the evenings were chilly and the sun was sinking. And what a meal she had spread! There were fresh-laid eggs; there was a veal pie; and home-made bread and farm butter, and honey and strawberry jam, set about a big bowl of daffodils. Sally sat with us and did full justice to the good things; but I was too tired to eat much, exhausted by excitement and several sleepless nights. Seeing this, Felicity prattled gently and did not wait for any response, as she poured out the tea. I don't remember what she talked about, but Bacon's famous saying that sweet scents were like to the warbling of birds in the air caught me, and some lines from Theocritus. Did I not love Theocritus? And was there any time so perfect as the spring, that of the Green Lady whose footprints are flowers, and whose voice is the song of birds? Did I hear the blackbird and the willow wren singing outside the window? Soon would come the nightingale; he was already fluting in the woods beyond the house, and might pay my trees a

visit. She hoped he would not disturb my rest. She had found me a nice little maid to help Sally in the morning, according to my request. Her name was Mabel Shaw and she would come at eight o'clock. There followed Mabel's family history. And by that time tea was over and my kind visitor departed.

As I turned from seeing her off at the door, Sally observed sapiently :

" That's a lady as'll never grow old, Miss Val, not when she's ninety-nine and three-quarters. She has a green 'eart and that sort keeps young. I'm glad she's took to you."

So was I—very glad.

III

Miss Heather and her maid had lighted fires in our two bedrooms, as well as hall and kitchen, and we found our beds well aired. They had also filled the lamps and left us a very useful little oil cooker, of new ingenious design. There was no gas in the house, as the landlord had been contemplating an electric light plant of his own when he had to leave. Shepherd's Delight, being a little way beyond the village, would have required the laying down of special pipes for either kind of illumination. There was gas in the village and electric light at the Hall, generated on the premises. But I did not want it, and could not imagine my old inn so modernised. I have always loved the soft light of oil and candles,

and the very word 'candle' holds a curious charm for me. Fortunately Sally is used to lamps, or we might have had some trouble with them. For your oil lamp is a skittish thing, mismanaged, and its wick, as I discovered, has a diabolical way of throwing up little spikes that carry flames beyond the right level and break their glass chimneys. They need watching too, lest a draught, or sudden freak of their own, cause them to spring up and spout forth sooty flakes, with an abominable smell. But for all their freakish, naughty ways I love them still; though I do not like to see a lamp go out slowly. It is so like a living creature dying, with little gasps and flutters of the breath until the last flicker, silence and darkness.

We decided to leave the task of unpacking until the morrow, although the monstrous forms that half filled the little hall appeared ghostly in the lamplight and I longed to unwrap and dispose of them. Straw and shavings under the sacking made them look formless and formidable. I might have had them stored in the stable till my arrival, as Miss Heather had suggested, but I preferred not to use the stable for a reason that may be surmised. We found plenty to do in going through the rooms and deciding where to put my own things; in taking our clothes out of their trunks and filling drawers and wardrobes, until nine o'clock was struck ponderously by the grandfather near the ingle nook, and a nightingale outside began a thrilling serenade to welcome me in my new home.

I went to the back door and listened, entranced. The moon had risen, like a mother-of-pearl lamp, out of the orchard trees, frosting the snow of their blossom with silver. Pomander, who had carefully inspected the house, crawling about close to ground and suspiciously snuffing at possible ambushes, now wished to inspect the garden and lured me out to him with little piteous cries of doubt and distress. He hates new places, poor dear, and felt sure this garden was a dangerous spot, full of wild beasts and pitfalls. He is a handsome fellow, a dark tabby, finely striped, with a broad face, green eyes, long whiskers and a magnificent thick tail; but I cannot honestly say that he is brave. I have known him chase a dog, certainly, but that was only in sheer desperation, when he had to show fight or be pounced upon. He is afflicted with a sceptical and suspicious fear of strangers, trusting nobody but me. This night he was obviously wretched, and did not disguise the fact that Shepherd's Delight held no delight for him, either of house or garden. He was even too depressed to catch a little white moth that fluttered by him, or to note certain little squeaks and twitters among the unpruned bushes that might well have suggested future spoil for him. Curiosity consumed him, however, and he did not let me go in again until he had thoroughly investigated the garden behind the house, snuffed at all the outhouse doors, crawled through the garden roller, tried what sort of earth it was and sharpened his claws on the trees.

The ground floor of Shepherd's Delight is all

stone-flagged save a passage and room built on to it within recent years; the passage leading to the kitchen, whose door was once straight into the hall; the room, now a parlour, running the whole length of hall and kitchen, at the right-hand side of the house. Upstairs the floors were of solid, uneven oak, with steps down into them; but the staircase was of stone, and as there was no carpet on it, our footsteps seemed to echo uncannily as Sally and I went up to bed bearing our lighted candles. I had a strange feeling, as I shut the staircase door behind me, that a host of little house goblins would now pop out of Grandfather Clock and the chimney-place to revel in the ancient inn parlour, play about the settles and climb over my monstrous forms in their sacking. The candle flames threw grotesque shadows on the walls and Pomander cried nervously in my arm. It was very ghostly and very delicious. I loved the thrill of it.

Sally, who is not devoid of imagination, felt this too.

"Don't it seem unked, Miss Val?" she said at my door, in an awed voice, almost a whisper. "If there was such things as ghosts, I'm sure they'd 'aunt this place. Not that I believe in 'em, of course—I'm not so stuperstitious—but there's a sort of feeling——"

A sudden ghastly cry outside made us both start and clutch each other, while Pomander pricked up his ears in terror. Then I breathed again.

"An owl, of course," I said, laughing. "It is

strange to us at first, Sally, but we shall get used to it, and all the queer noises. Still, perhaps we may as well keep the door open between our rooms to-night, in case we are nervous."

Most of the upstairs rooms were connected by doors, and I had arranged for Sally's to be next to mine. We left the door ajar, and had no more scares that night. Pomander went to sleep in his basket, after an exhaustive survey of the room. I had taught him, by firm opposition to his importunities, that my bed was no place for cats, and he came to the conclusion that his own smelt *comme il faut* and was no new-fangled device for his destruction, as he, at first, suspected. The nightingale, who had flown away when I went into the garden, returned to pour out a passion of ecstatic song in a tree not too near my window, and I went to sleep thinking of Keats and magic casements and candles and piping shepherds and all manner of lovely things.

CHAPTER IV

I

WOODSIDE stands off the main road from Meadborough to Monk's Wold, another village about two miles distant. The Bede House is about as far from this road as it is from Shepherd's Delight, which lies on the way to Blossomville, off a by-road edged here and there with spinneys, lovely with wild flowers most of the year and haunted by every kind of wild creature. My little house rears its red roof and square chimney-stacks only just above the tall hawthorn hedge that guards its front garden from the road, and is about thirty feet behind it; so that, even from my bedroom window, I am able to see but the heads of motorists and cyclists swimming past. And they can catch a glimpse of my cot through the wicket gate. At each side of this gate is an old and knarled thorn tree; white, of course, for, at the time of their planting, I doubt if the pink double hawthorn had been hybridised. At present, however, they were clothed only in 'vital emerald green,' that first green of the year which we see not again after primrose and cowslip have bloomed.

Behind my garden at the back I discovered a barley field, lying between it and the woods beyond,

which give the village its name. It has already a silvery-blue tint and I look forward to the time when the feathery ears will wave in the wind like a moonlit sea. There will be lovely aliens in it, too, I perceive from their springing grey-green foliage—red flame of poppy, gold corn-daisies and the dainty corydalis (whose name is all music) with its spikes of soft pink; not inaptly called fumitory, or smoke of the earth. Enemies of the staff of life as they are, I cannot help hoping the pretty darlings may deck the field when summer comes.

For another reason I was glad to find this stretch of cornfield between my garden and the woods It will be a safe and happy playground for Sir Charles, who can do his duty in that state of life into which it has pleased Providence to place him by catching mice and moles there (which he never eats, being far too fastidious), and he will not want to stray beyond it to the dangerous zone of steel traps and game-keepers. I had lived once, during my wanderings, near a wood full of preserved game, and had no peace of mind when Pomander was stalking.

But I had not much time for roaming out of doors on rambles of discovery the first few days after my arrival. The unpacking of my chattels; the clearing away of masses of straw and shavings; the hauling about of chairs and book-shelves; the laying down of carpets and rolling away of those whose places they occupied; the rearranging of rooms (for what woman is satisfied with the arrangements in a house furnished by another woman?),

the hanging of pictures and so forth, engaged all my energies until I was too tired to do anything but roll myself in a rug on my lounge with a book.

My Broadwood did not arrive until three days later, and its unpacking was a work of some hours. I had the assistance of the village carpenter and a woman called Mrs. Mee, recommended by the Heathers as a capable 'char lady.' She was certainly capable and anxious to please, but equally anxious to make us acquainted with all her most private affairs. I had to listen to a lacerating account of her late husband's illness and death, with all the ghastly details of loathsome disease, till I felt too sick to eat my lunch; and I could hear the recital going on for the benefit of Sally and Mabel long after I had fled her presence. It is true she spoke cheerfully enough; I suppose familiarity with her theme had blunted the edge of pain. But her descriptive eloquence haunted me for days.

The long low hall looked even quainter than before when my old Welsh spinning-wheel, oak chest, and spinet joined the other antiques in it. The latter is my greatest treasure, though I will not swear it is a veritable spinet, and suspect it is a very early eighteenth-century piano, made before the tall back was designed. I set it upon a thick Persian rug, that its dainty feet might not suffer from the contact of cold stone and carry up a chill to its sensitive internal structure. For it must be admitted that a very little cold or damp or change of atmosphere could set my old pet jangling out of

tune; and the re-tuning, which I had learnt to do myself, was rather troublesome. But I would not put it in my parlour with the Broadwood as a rival. That were too cruel.

There was little space for my pictures on the walls of the old bar parlour, which I intended to make my living-room. It has two windows and three doors in it. One door leads, as I have said, upstairs; one to the passage outside connecting kitchen and parlour; and one is the front door, from which the room is sheltered by a tall oak screen. But I found space for oil paintings of my grandfather and grandmother, and for the homely little pictures that used to hang in our nursery at home, broadly framed in dark, shiny mahogany; coloured prints of the Infant Samuel, of Christ blessing Little Children, of Daniel in the Lions' Den and other favourite subjects. I like best one of Mrs. Siddons as Lady Macbeth, in early Victorian attire, and "A Reading Lesson," which represents a lady in a low-necked, puff-sleeved gown, with her hair drawn up by a comb to the top of her sleek head, teaching a small boy in long pants and a frilled shirt, who sits on a stool at her feet with a very large book. The lady is so pretty, the boy so quaint and the colouring so fine that I have often wondered who painted it originally.

These I hung between the windows, and over the fireplace, my two samplers, both more than a hundred years old. One was worked by my great-grandmother at the age of eleven, and is dated 1799.

Amid a forest of capital letters and odd devices it bears a pious motto :

> Lord, give me wisdom to direct my ways
> I ask not riches nor yet length of days.

On the shelf below I ranged two or three willow-pattern plates and Chelsea figures, with a queer old copper beer-warmer, like a large extinguisher, a pestle and mortar and a shaving-pot of the same metal. I love copper, it has such a rich warm glow ; and I could not resist the temptation to hang my copper warming-pan by Grandfather Clock, though my taste does not altogether approve of warming-pans in sitting-rooms. It seems to chime with Grandfather Clock, however, who is a very homely old thing, with a little country scene above its dial, wherein a tiny butcher slays a tethered ox every second of the day and night. A horrid idea, however you take it, materially or symbolically. One is bound to think of Time as the Destroyer, killing us moment by moment, ticking away our lives. And yet I find that old clock adorable.

II

With my parlour I had a somewhat freer hand, as the owners had left only the bigger pieces of furniture they could not get into their tiny seaside bungalow : a big divan and two Chesterfield chairs, covered in a cretonne whose black ground was patterned with strange blue birds. The same material formed

long curtains to the bow windows, flanking the smaller ones of tussore silk that veiled the casements. The varnished floor had no carpet, only a few cheap rugs, which I discarded to make room for my own Axminster square of soft blue, with its wreath of misty pink roses; thanking my stars that the blue birds did not offend it. There were some odious wicker chairs, which I relegated to the kitchen, a card-table and a small Sutherland tea-table, set, with its flaps down, by the wall. It was a long room and I found plenty of wall-space for my Bartalozzi prints and a few rather nice water-colours. My Broadwood, of course, occupied the place of honour, and near it my music cabinets ready for their accumulated hoard, not yet unpacked. And when my book-cases were added I felt that the room was really furnished.

It had been built on to the house and, as I have said, ran its whole depth. At the end opposite the window there was an aperture, covered by a curtain, which led into a smaller room, and this ante-chamber had no window proper, but only a glass door leading into the garden. I resolved to make it my study and workroom. It should be lined with books. I had so many that it was a problem where to stow them all, and it would be necessary to call in again the services of the village carpenter, to put up shelves. A slice had been cut off this room to make a narrow back staircase, which gave it a lop-sided aspect, but there was an alcove under the stairs that I could curtain off to hide musty old

encyclopædias and the useless literary lumber that is the accumulation of years and that, for old sake's sake, one does not like to eject.

The parlour had also a glass door leading on to a verandah with a glazed roof, part of which was enclosed and formed a small conservatory. The verandah gave upon a grass court on the east side of the house and promised to be sweetly cool in hot weather. This court was enclosed by yew hedges and presided over by a weather-beaten little statue of Hermes, twined with ivy and almost as green himself. Behind him, not too near the hedge, a weedy flower-bed showed a few straggling ivy geraniums that had weathered the mild winter, with snapdragons, leopard's bane and Brompton stocks. Daffodils, tulips, narcissi and primroses were flowering in the unkempt grass, with the buds and foliage of wild hyacinths, cowslips, fritillaries and other dainty May flowers. I was to find later that the weedy flower-bed contained the root of delphinium, madonna lilies, anchusa, tree lupin and many more herbaceous beauties, not yet ready to cast their wonderful colours on the background of dark yew.

It was hard to tear myself from the garden and unpack books on a perfect April morning, when "o'er the land the Spring did flame with love and flowers"; when the lark's ecstasy thrilled through the fragrant air and little brown bees slipped in and out of the honey-cups. There is evidently a feast for them in the ruddy wallflowers and purple honesty

of my back garden, where their humming is like the sound of a distant sea. I was leaving them reluctantly when I saw, at the back door, the gardener Miss Heather had promised to send me, as I correctly surmised. He touched his cap and informed me of the fact as I approached him, and we entered into negotiations at once.

His name was Jolly, he said, but he did not look it. A more lugubrious countenance I have never seen. But he brightened a little when we talked about the garden, and I detected a fellow feeling in his love of the plant world not less than my own, although leaning, perhaps, to the cabbage and potato side. He was not young, about fifty probably, and from the undarned, unpatched condition of his wearing apparel, I argued a slatternly wife and neglected home. But I was wrong. It transpired later that he was an old bachelor who, crossed in love in his youth, had gone for a soldier. The loss of one eye and a scar down one side of his face added, no doubt, to the sourness of his expression, if not to his disposition; but I found that he had a very good opinion of himself and was not really so dejected as he looked. He was ready to come and assist in my garden three days a week on reasonable terms, so I engaged him, then and there, to come next day. But he graciously consented to break open my packing-cases for me before leaving. There were ten of them, full of books and music, and they had been nailed up with a view to defying the united efforts of the railway "goods department."

When he had wrenched the lids off and departed, I started to take out my books, with the usual result. It may seem, to the uninitiated, a simple job enough, but when you love every individual book as a child, its appearance, its feel and its smell—(oh, that delicious aroma of printer's ink, paper, binding and heaven knows what !)—it is not so easy to treat it as a lifeless thing. The first books I happened to take up were two precious little volumes of *The Hesperides*, and how could I let them go without a dip? On such a morning too, when the very air seemed to breathe Herrick! In half an hour I was still gloating. "Come, my Corinna, let us go a-Maying" had wooed me for the hundredth time, and the old sweet lyrics with their wealth of fantastic images and frankly sensuous appeal held me bound, turning the pages with a smile of delight, while my subconscious mind scoffed the while at the ideas of the seventeenth century.

> Then be not coy, but use your time
> And while ye may go marry,
> For having lost but once your prime
> Ye may for ever tarry.

I suppose it was a terrible threat to the women of that romantic age and effectively used by the gallants for their own ends. That effect is surely lost now; our modern girls would laugh at it. But the Elizabethan and Caroline poets harped on it persistently, from Shakespeare downwards, scorning the 'unthrifty loveliness' whose flower bore no fruit.

From where I sat I could see the exquisite Forsythia showering her pale gold blossoms about my verandah, and it seemed to me that there stood a reputation of such false doctrine; for beauty is surely its own end and justification. I wonder what those gallants would have thought of a creature like me, a virgin nearly thirty and undismayed; lacking the faintest desire to gather emblematic roses, and entirely uninfluenced by any dread of " hideous winter . . . age and cold decay."

I was playing with this idea, inventing an imaginary dialogue, when a voice at the door asked how I was getting on, and I started guiltily. Sally remembered my weakness, no doubt. I detected reproof in her tone and slapped the covers of *The Hesperides* together with emphasis as I assured her that the work was going on well.

After that I took myself sternly in hand, refusing to be seduced from my task even by Parkinson or Culpeper or Gerard, who exercise an almost unholy spell upon my fancy. I have original editions of the *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris* and *The English Physitian,* whose title-page alone is a continual feast to me.

" Being an Astrologo Physical Discourse of the Vulgar Herbs of this Nation : containing a Compleat Method of Physick whereby a man may preserve his Body in Health; or cure himself, being Sick, for threepence Charge, with such things only as grow in England, they being most fit for English Bodies . . . Herein is also shewed . . . The Way of making

Plaisters, Oyntments, Oyls, Pultisses, Syrups, Decoctions, julips or Waters, of al sorts of Physical Herbs. What Planet governeth every Herb or Tree . . . the Time of gathering al Herbs, both Vulgarly and Astrologically, etc. By Rich. Culpeper, Gent. Student of Physic and Astrology."

Culpeper makes me shudder, with his frank expositions of our physical economy, but I find him deliciously funny nevertheless, and his personality stands out of his book as complete and actual as Chaucer stands out of the *Canterbury Tales*. One can see the testy old fellow, with his dogmatic self-assertion, his shrewd humour, his slashing attacks on all other doctors. "Medicene without astrology is like a pudding without fat," he declares; and "he that reads this and understands what he reads, he hath a jewel more worth than a Diamond." But I love my Parkinson better, and an old reprint of Gerard's *Grete Herball*, which is perfectly irresistible. And unfortunately Sally caught me again, as I was sitting, cross-legged on the floor by the book-case, revelling in Gerard's stately Elizabethan prose.

"Lunch is ready, Miss Val," she said, as I was reading: "What greater delight is there than to behold the earth apparelled with plants as with a robe of imbroidered work set with orient pearls and garnished with great diversitie of rare and costly jewels? . . . But these delights are in the outward senses—the principal delight is in the mind singularly enriched . . ."

I got up and faced her boldly.

"See what I have done this morning, Sally. All my philosophies and biographies on the lower shelves, and the poets above. Garden books——"

She took advantage of my slight pause to say with a sweeping glance over the tumbled heaps on the floor: "I was going to ask if I couldn't help you put 'em up, Miss, seeing as they take so much time." And I knew that my protestation of industry fell on a deaf ear.

Without another word I rose and went meekly to my lunch.

CHAPTER V

I

By the time I had arranged the poets in their long lines, with my precious old books below them, my head was swimming. The musty smell of old leather, much as I love it, can become rather overwhelming after a while, and I have nice old editions of *The Arcadia, Rosalynde, Euphues, Utopia, Comfort in Tribulation, Piers Plowman, Urn Burial,* North's *Plutarch,* the travels of Mandeville and Hakluyt. Surrey's translation of the *Æneid,* in black letter, is among these treasures, and a remarkably quaint early history of Ireland, in which the genealogical table of kings dates back to Noah.

A cup of tea revived me and I strolled forth to "eat the air" with a pleasant sense of duty done and an appetite for the beauty that lies outside books. My objective was the wood behind the house, so I started briskly down the road, curved round a corner and soon found myself at a gate that led to a riding, whose deep ruts showed it to be used as a cart track. I could follow it without fear of being lost, since it must lead out somewhere.

Oh, the loveliness of that wood! Its carpet of primroses, anemones and dog violets—the pale darlings that have no scent but are so daintily

beautiful in flower and foliage; its delicate tracery of pale green against the blue sky; its soft rustling of undergrowth where wild things scurried from my footsteps. They fell so gently in the mossy turf that I wondered how they could scare any creature. But it is quiet in the woods and sounds gather force from the silence. The song of birds seemed louder than in my garden.

I had not wandered far when I became aware of another, less musical sound, the heavy thud of an axe or hammer. I walked on towards it, and presently came near enough to discover what it was. The discovery was somewhat startling.

A girl in a white crêpe blouse and very short skirt was attacking an old fir tree with an axe; a girl whose dark eyes shone in an impish face, red as a rose with exertion. Two dogs, a spaniel and a fox terrier, were snuffing about for rabbits close by. They gave vent to short barks on my approach and came to meet me with cocked, suspicious ears.

The girl looked round, saw me and stopped her work.

"Hullo!" she said; "who are you? The new tenant, I suppose." Then, under her breath, "Poor thing!"

I caught the words and laughed.

"Why 'poor thing'?" I asked.

"I pity the deluded one who comes to settle in this fox's hole," she said. "Even we, who know everybody and are used to it, find it deadly dull. If you're used to anything livelier, you'll commit

suicide in a week—or perhaps you might stick it a month. Yes—I give you a month."

"Thanks. That's very kind of you. But I can assure you I shall not find it dull. I'm coming across surprises every minute."

She grinned. "Oh, but you won't find any more surprise packets like me. I'm the unique exception. And even I don't often have these fits of mania. I felt to-day that I must do something desperate—or burst! Have you ever tried tree-chopping? It's a top-hole way of blowing off superfluous steam."

"I haven't much to blow off, as a rule. None at all just now, as I find unpacking my goods and chattels uses it all up."

"Well, I'm glad you've come, anyhow, Miss —— I've heard your name but forgotten it."

I told her it was Valentine Prescott, and she said hers was José Wakelyn: "commonly called Jo. My godfathers and godmothers at my baptism named me Josephine—for which many years of purgatory are due—but of course I couldn't stick that."

I replied that José is certainly prettier, especially as she pronounced it, with the initial liquefied, Spanish fashion; but that I rather liked Josephine, it was uncommon.

"Not in our family. Josephines are 'plentiful as tabby cats.' When did you come?"

"Last Wednesday. And I've been 'blowing off superfluous steam' ever since, in getting my house shipshape. To-day I've spent hours and hours arranging books."

"Books!" she echoed softly, ending with a whistle. "Oh, lor! Then I expect you are a highbrow."

I disclaimed the title, asking: "Don't you care for books?"

"Depends. I don't mind a good exciting story, but descriptions of scenery and moral sentiments always send me to sleep. Of course one is glad of any kind of book in this deadly hole, especially in winter, and one can always skip the padding. But I expect you're a fearful blue. I was afraid of it from what Miss Heather said."

"What did she say?"

"Oh, I don't know—that you were a kindred spirit and all that. I quite expected to see another old maid, like them."

"If only I could be like them!" was my pious ejaculation. "I think they're lovely."

"Why of course they are—perfect dears. But you don't want to be an old maid, do you?"

"Why not?"

She opened her dark eyes wide, as if amazed at the question. Then, with a boyish laugh, she said:

"Oh, I see: you're advanced, want a vote and all that. When you come to think of it, I don't know why girls want to get married. I'm sure I don't. Have a cig?"

She had slipped on her coat, that hung on a bush near, and now handed me a serviceable leather cigarette case, initialled in silver. I declined.

"Conventional reasons—or what?" she enquired, striking a match.

"Merely fastidious. I don't care for the taste or smell, that's all."

"You'd get to like it."

"Perhaps. But I don't want to."

"Think it unfeminine?"

I laughed. "Do you want me to make excuses? Why cultivate a habit that's neither useful nor beautiful just because other people do? Isn't it enough that I don't care for tobacco?"

She meditated a few moments. I had seated myself on the bank and she looked down on me with her head a little on one side.

"I shall call on you," she said then. "I swore I wouldn't, but I shall."

"Do. You may smoke all the time if you like. I can open all the doors and windows when you've gone."

"How many dogs may I bring?"

"None. My house is presided over by an Egyptian deity." Seeing her perplexed look, I explained—"a worshipful cat."

"Oh, do you like cats?" The flat tone of disappointment was in her voice. "Why?"

"Because they are decorative and mysterious and deliciously soft and soothing and affectionate and independent and fastidiously clean and, above all, silent. They are also humorous."

"Humorous! Oh, not so humorous as dogs, surely. Don't you like dogs?"

I had to admit that they were humorous and lovable, but added: "Their mania for making a noise disqualifies them for my affection. If they didn't want to bark on the slightest provocation, I might love them. But I don't care for their aroma any more than for tobacco."

She shrugged her shoulders, obviously in some contempt for my heterodoxy on the subject.

"May I come on a Sunday?" she asked, as I rose and prepared to stroll back with her, "or do you bar Sunday visitors?"

I assured her that she would not be barred any day, and we walked along the riding together, without much further conversation; for nightingales were joining in the chorus of birdsong, led by merle and throstle, and when a nightingale, quite near to you, makes the very air throb with music, it is not easy to talk of common things or remember what you wish to say. I murmured once:

> Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird,
> No hungry generations tread thee down,

and my companion asked: "What did you say?"

"Only Keats," I replied apologetically, and she exclaimed: "Oh, poetry! I've never read any since I left school. Can't stick it." After that we lapsed into silence.

II

"Who is Miss Josephine Wakelyn?" I asked, in the kitchen, where Mrs. Mee was helping Sally

polish the silver, brass and copper, left so long untouched.

She broke off her thrilling recital of village scandal to answer me.

"She's the Squire's young lady, Miss, and a horful nice young lady she is too, if a bit wild. But there, what can you expect with no Ma?"

"Then she lives alone with her father, in the Hall, I suppose?"

"Well, not exactly alone, 'm; there's the Squire's sister what lives with 'em and looks after the 'ouse-keeping. But she never interferes with Miss Jo, nor the Squire neither. She's the very apple of his eye, so to speak, since her poor Ma died. That were a sad case, poor lady! She got pewmonia and blood poison and it all broke out——"

Having already experienced Mrs. Mee's appetite for horrors and power of graphic description, I thereupon made excuse and fled the kitchen.

III

After my evening meal, too slight to bear the name of dinner, I sat in my woodbine-covered porch, looking idly out into the advancing night and listening to the music in my hawthorns. The screaming of village children and incontinent barking of dogs were too far off to disturb the harmony, and were dying down as the moon glided up from soft purple mists above the trees. I have often noticed that those sweet, pensive hours between

sunset and moonrise are the ubiquitous dog's worst time, the time when it is most impossible to enjoy a country stroll without the irruption of his strident and irritating voice. Now the cessation of barks was like a healing dew and I could enjoy the rippling melody of thrush and blackbird undisturbed. A star trembled over the great beech tree in the road opposite my gate, as if it knew and feared the moon's coming rivalry. I was too lazy to think and could only murmur half aloud lines that floated into my mind from the store of verse I hoarded there.

> Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
> And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
> Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight
> And drousy tinklings lull the distant fields.

Gray's pictures are all like that, serene and austerely beautiful; balanced like the music of a fugue. It is strange how one finds the same sense of form and measure in Keats without the same repose and with infinitely more colour. The difference is like that between sculpture and painting. One feels the restless ardent ghost in Keats haunting his most stately verse. It is marvellous how he could confine illimitable passion within the compass of such perfectly metrical stanzas as those of *The Eve of St. Agnes*. How *did* he do it—work that exquisite tapestry in jewelled words that are yet all pulsing with life and desire? How clearly the silent house is painted, the frosty night outside,

the maiden's chamber! We see where the 'chain-drooped lamps flicker at each door,' and where

> The arras, rich with horseman, hawk and hound,
> Flutter'd in the besieging wind's uproar:
> And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor.

Only a magician could combine such exquisite and homely images. I once learnt this poem by heart and it is a priceless possession.

Into my thoughts the nightingale broke suddenly from the beech opposite and changed their current to song. Why is the nightingale's way of singing unpopular to-day? Our modern songs are all subordinated to words. The old masters, Bach, Handel, Purcell, Bishop and the rest, modelled theirs on the song of Philomela, with trills and roulades of sweet sound in which words were of little account. I thought of *Hush, ye pretty Warbling Choir* and *Lo, here the gentle lark* till they possessed me and I had to go in and sing them.

But, after the nightingale, my voice sounded depressing, flat and tuneless. I could not endure it in either of the above songs, but it sounded a little better in the plaintive *As when the Dove,* which was also more suited to the low tinkle of the spinet. I finished to a subdued applause and turned to see the two Heathers standing by the door screen.

They were enthusiastic about my song, my voice, my spinet, and begged me to sing again, one of my own songs.

"The one about the raindrops," said Miss Felicity. "We have heard it once and thought it so very pretty."

"After Handel!" I exclaimed. "Oh, I couldn't."

It wasn't a pose. I like my own little songs, of course, or I should not write them; but they won't bear comparison with any really good music. The dear ladies would not listen to my protests, however, and I had to sing them the sentimental ditty that was adding so substantially to my income.

Here are the words of it:

All night I hear the patter feet,
The footsteps of the rain,
Fall hurrying and whispering
Upon my window pane.
They seem to run with eager haste
As if they all were fain
To reach the happy, longed-for day
When you come home again.

The nights are long, the days are cold,
The skies are dull and grey:
The birds refuse to sing to me
When you are far away.
Dark shadows o'er my spirit fall
And there will they remain
Until the dawn of that fair day
When you come home again.

My voice had changed miraculously—I was hearing it now with the ears of two women whose own sweetness of nature sweetens everything they

hear, or see, or know. The experience was not new to me. I suppose it is the experience of all 'sensitives,' who are dependent on sympathy.

"I wish Linda Walton could hear you sing that song," said Felicity, when their kindly chorus of praise had subsided. "She sings it very nicely, but not as you do. Or perhaps it is in the accompaniment. One hears the pattering of the tiny rain-feet and the sigh of the wakeful, sorrowing heart in the music; that touching minor strain of melody which gives such effect to the words."

"Who is Linda Walton?" I asked.

"Mr. Walton is our biggest farmer here, and she is his eldest child. You must hear her sing. She has really a beautiful voice, though untrained."

"And that reminds me," observed Prudence, "Mrs. Walton asked me yesterday whether I thought you would like her to call. I said I was sure you would. Was that right?"

"Certainly. I like farms and farmers—or I did till I stayed at a farmhouse as paying guest. But I count that as an exception. Farmers always seem to me a class apart. I suppose fiction has glorified them. One always thinks of the farm in a setting of fragrant hayricks, quaint old barns, raftered rooms and delicious dairies."

The sisters laughed softly. "You must say that to Mrs. Walton. She will love you for it. But I don't know that Linda will agree. I'm afraid she is a little discontented. Of course there's a very practical side to farming, and the work of a farmer's

wife—even of a well-to-do one—is full of responsibility and hard work."

"Oh, I know, there must be. And then the noises—the ridiculous cocks and hens, who make so much fuss over trifles; the horrible guinea-fowl that tears one's nerves to pieces at early morn; the miserable cow who bemoans her lost calf all night—haven't I endured them? But nevertheless I love farms, as I love children, in my fancy—and at a respectable distance."

"I am sure you love children always and anywhere," Felicity exclaimed. "Every true woman does."

I could not shock her by declaring that I had no love for the village children I heard yelling like demons about the roads, or that, in my opinion, the fact that women have to bring all children into the world does not guarantee them to be either devoted mothers or lovers of other people's offspring. One shrinks from disillusioning women like these, so happy in a simple faith, so ready to believe all that is ideal and comforting. At least, that was how I felt then. Now that I know the Heathers better I speak my candid thoughts to them and find they do not flinch.

They went away soon after this, and as I watched them, from my gate, down the road, I could not help wondering at the foolish, wasteful fate which had left them unmarried—two perfect mothers lost to the world. Perhaps it was the serene beauty of the night that stirred a sentimental ache, a longing

for the fulfilment of some unknown romance. Unreasonably I sighed for those two dear women—and for myself !

IV

In the pages of this discursive book of mine I intend to be quite truthful, and so must set down here a confession of extraordinary silliness for wise people to laugh at. I confess to a lover whom I have never seen and never shall see—who does not, in fact, exist !

We meet in dreams, waking and sleeping, in that Land of Moonshine, " where happy souls go wandering all free "—free from all the earthly defects that spoil the fair face of romance.

I don't remember when Amyas first came to me. I think he must have descended from my childish hero, Richard, Cœur de Lion, that pure hero of romance whose very name is a poem. For some years he faded to a dim shadow in the background of life, when actual men came into it, with their very real, if commonplace, wooing. Towards these I was always so perverse as to be attracted only by the swains who were not attracted to me. But perhaps that is no sign of perversity. Mutual attraction is a much rarer thing than we are apt to suppose, and half the girls in the world marry because they love being loved and cannot resist a man's ardour. I was as much in love with love as the rest, but I wanted to do my full share of the loving, and this I found impossible with any of the

young men I knew. They supplied none of the essentials. They were either dull mentally or repellant physically, and I met not one who evoked even a wraith of spiritual passion. So I fell back on Amyas, who fulfilled all my requirements—Amyas, my dream-lover, the man of my heart!

Ah, where is he? Is it possible that he exists somewhere on this habitable globe and yet that I may never see him in the flesh?

I conjure up his dear presence: the tall manly figure; capable sinewy hands; the clear-cut face, with its firm chin, humorous mouth, bronzed skin and blue-grey eyes; the general look of keen intelligence; the hearty, boyish laugh; the fine sympathy and understanding. He is so real I can almost see him outlined against my hawthorn and eglantine hedge, whose aroma the warm day has cast upon the air.

One day, years ago, in an absurd mood, I wrote myself a letter from Amyas, in a half-defined belief that he might be guiding my hand, after the fashion of the 'controls' we hear of from occultists. And how I enjoyed writing that ridiculous letter! It began: "Girl of my Heart" and ended "with all my love and devotion—Amyas." I can laugh over it now, and the fantastic folly that prompted it; but I still cherish my ideal lover and evoke him when I feel sentimental—which is chiefly on such nights as this.

He is 'a veray parfit, gentil knight,' my Amyas. Although he can do everything well and is, in the

best sense, a sportsman, he takes no joy in killing for its own sake and would rather shoot at a target than at a bird. He loves books and music, and has a fine baritone voice. I have gone so far as to practise my part of duets with him! He is interested in everything that interests me and in nothing that does not interest me. He is, in fact, my Other Self!

I never dwell upon our marriage. We are married enough in this perfect union of sympathy, it seems to me. What can one desire more? I assure myself that no mere flesh and blood man could ever content me so well. With him, I should suffer constant disillusion. There is no danger of that with Amyas!

CHAPTER VI

I

TIRED but happy days succeeded, in halcyon weather. April curtsied to May and prepared to depart. My rooms were beginning to look tidy and in the garden Jolly was effecting a great clearance of weeds and rubbish, pruning and slashing at hedges. I found he had some topiary knowledge and rejoiced in the hope of seeing Adam and Eve appear once more each side of my porch. I did a little weeding when I could, to vary the brain fag of thinking where my things should go, for I always find this more exhausting than any steady mental work; I suppose because of my vacillating mind. Some people know exactly what they want to do—and do it. Not so Valentine Prescott. She wants one thing one minute, another thing the next. A chair placed here pleases her in the morning; its position must be changed by night! Pictures hung side by side must be changed, their places taken by others. And as for books—I gave myself strange pains between the eyes because I could not decide how to arrange them in satisfactory order, and could not pass them without dipping in. After the poets my essayists are the most importunate and seductive.

If I resist Charles Lamb, I am apt to be caught by Stevenson; and should I succeed in ignoring the appeal of Richard Jeffries, Lafcadio Hearn may hold me up, while the Breakfast Table books exercise on me the same kind of magic that the Bible exercises on better men. Age cannot wither them nor custom stale their infinite variety. To handle any one of Holmes's books without opening it is quite beyond my power.

But I did manage some classified arrangement at last. Sally discovered a way to check my evil propensity for gloating when I should be working. She has a voice that would be invaluable to a Punch and Judy showman, and when she starts singing one of her favourite hymns, *Pleasant are Thy courts above*, or *Rock of Ages*, I am reduced to mental pulp, and she knows it. On several occasions I have been obliged to remonstrate, apologetically. I do it humbly enough, feeling conscious of what she has to endure from my vocal exercises. It must be very trying to hear the 'ahs' and 'ees' and absurd phrases, changing the vowel sounds, which the singer has to practise. But Sally never seems to mind. She is one of the happy ones who do not hear exacerbating noises. Often when I have complained of a barking dog or ecstatic hen, she has said in reply "What dog?" or "What hen?" as if perfectly unconscious of the nuisance.

But although immune to noise she has grasped the fact that I am not, and now, when she thinks I ought to be disturbed, she has hit on a way to arrest

my attention by a cacophonous hint. As soon as *Rock of Ages*, flat and tuneless, penetrates through the kitchen wall to my ears, I am recalled to duty as the soldier is called by the bugle. It was clever of Sally to think of this.

The unpacking of my possessions was fraught with minor woes. Some of my darling little Dresden, Chelsea and Faience figures were damaged and a Sèvre cup broken to atoms. My grandmother's china tea service was also chipped and injured. I groaned over these as I arranged them in a quaint rounded cupboard set in the wall of my parlour, especially over my dainty figures, shepherds and shepherdesses, Strephon playing his pipe, Chloe lifting her skirts in the dance. There is one pretty pair I love most, in old Fontainebleau faience: a courtly couple in eighteenth-century dress seated in wide Georgian arm-chairs; the beau fiddling, the belle fondling a lap-dog. And as I looked at the adorable pair, with their deliciously soft colouring and grace of attitude, it struck me that they bore a kind of resemblance to the two gracious sisters of the Bede House, with their air of delicate repose, and old-world courtesy. I named them to myself "Les Dames de Faïence," and after that I never looked at my dainty couple without thinking of the Heathers.

II

On May Day the village children brought garlands to my door and sang :

> A branch of may, a branch of may
> Before your door it stands;
> Nothing but a sprout, but it's well budded out
> With the works of Our Lord's hands.

There was no branch of may to be seen and the so-called ' garland ' was a sorry affair : a couple of hoops, one within the other, tied up with ribbons and bunches of drooping greenery and flowers; a very hideous wax doll, in gaudy finery, set in the midst. But for all its ugliness it charmed me, and so did the fresh voices of the children, as they exhorted me to take my Bible in my hands and read a chapter through, so that when the Day of Judgment comes the Lord would remember me. I made up my mind, as I sent them off happy with cakes and pennies, that another year we would have a real garland and a fairer representation of the Virgin, or Maia, goddess of spring and growth. I should enjoy making a little shrine for her. But it must be on Old May Day, the 12th, " when maybuds they are swelling," and there can be some hawthorn in the garland.

I experimented upon the next singers who came to my door. They were five small girls in white frocks, wearing no hats, but having their frizzled hair tied up with gay ribbons, like a wagoner's

horses. Their garland was a little better than the first, with real branches of may, in bud, and bunches of cowslips among the wallflowers and daffodils. I took them round to my Hermes Court and set them on a garden seat while I read some of *The Queen's Maying*, and *Come, my Corinna* to them, after supplying each one with a large slice of bread and jam, my cakes being exhausted. There they sat, munching stolidly, their wide, unblinking eyes fixed on my face, like a row of little gingerbread rabbits, while I assaulted them with Malory and Herrick.

"And thus it passed on from Candlemas until after Easter, that the month of May was come, when every lusty heart beginneth to blossom, and to bring forth fruit. . . . Therefore, like as May month flowereth and flourisheth in many gardens, so in likewise let every man of worship flourish his heart in this world, first unto God and next unto the joy of them that he flourisheth his faith unto. . . . And so it befel in the month of May. Queen Guinevere called unto her knights of the Table Round, and she gave them warning that early upon the morrow she would ride a-maying into woods and fields beside Westminster. And I warn you that there be none of you but that he be well horsed, and that ye all be clothed in green, outher in silk, outher in cloth; and I shall bring with me ten ladies, and every knight shall have a lady behind him, and every knight shall have a squire and two yeomen; and I will that ye all be well horsed . . . and so

upon the morn they took their horses with the queen and rode a-maying in woods and meadows as it pleased them, in great joy and delight."

"What do you make of that, children?" I asked. "Wouldn't you like to have seen the Queen with all her knights go a-maying?"

A little fear crept into their gazing eyes. What would the strange lady be asking next? The boldest swallowed a large mouthful of jammy bread and faltered, "Yes, teacher," adding, "my mother seen the Queen once."

They were still eating, so I tried Corinna on them.

> There's not a budding boy or girl this day
> But is got up and gone to bring in May.
> A deal of youth, ere this, is come
> Back, and with white thorn laden, home.
> Some have despatched their cakes and cream
> Before that we have left to dream——

A shrill voice interrupted me.

"That's poickry. We learn poickry in our school."

"Tell me some," I said; and, after some bashful giggling and pushing each other forward, they stood out one by one and declaimed their little pieces, with obvious pride and pleasure; for which they each received a copper prize. And it was quite plain to me that the appeal of poetry was greater to them than prose. The 'gingerbread rabbit expression' vanished before I had read three lines.

They knew 'poickry' when they heard it. My compliments to the school teachers!

III

I have not yet examined the interior of the haunted stable, and when the children had departed something moved me to do so. The door was open, for the lawn-mower and roller were kept there and Jolly had been rolling the grass before he went to dinner. I looked round on the threshold with a little shiver of the nerves, half expecting to see a shadowy form swinging from the rafters. It was very dark, the window being almost covered with ivy outside, and divers odd things filled up the horse box and other corners: broken pieces of furniture, a camp bedstead, with a hole in its wire mattress, a broken wicker chair, a dilapidated cake-stand, a dog-kennel, etc. I rummaged about among them, and came across a box full of dusty old magazines and sixpenny books, which I haled out, thinking they might amuse Sally. And my exertion was rewarded, for I found a treasure at the bottom. It was a small, yellow-covered book of manuscript music, with the date 1783 inside, containing several old songs with alluring titles. I tumbled all the books back into the box and fled into the house, and to my piano.

The songs were copied, with 'lute tableture,' in very precise and perfect style, clear as print; although, of course, the ink was brown and faded. I did not know any of them. *Farewell, Man-*

chester was the first, a haunting Jacobite melody. *The Spanish Lady* followed, with a pretty, plaintive tune and a whole page of verses written opposite to it, in fine, crabbed writing. But the song that thrilled me most was the third in the book—*I am a Poor Shepherd Undone*, copied from *Pills to Purge Melancholy;* for I found, after the refrain "Alas! poor Shepherd," a line faintly scrawled in a different handwriting, hard to decipher:

At Shepherd's Delight for aye lamenteth,

and the idea gripped me instantly that this must be the air piped by my ghost, in which the writer evidently believed.

Although the music was written for the lute, I managed to harmonise and play it; but the piano was too heavy for the dainty thing, and I took it to my spinet. There were several verses, two of which ran as follows:

I am a poor shepherd undone,
And cannot be cured by art,
A maiden as bright as the sun
Has stolen away my heart.

I asked her the reason why
She could not of me approve.
She said 'twas a task too hard
To give any reason for love.

To each verse came the refrain:

Alas! poor shepherd,
Alack and well-a-day!
Before I fell in love, O,
Every month was May.

As I sang, the air about me seemed to grow colder, the light dimmer, till I shivered and looked over my shoulder apprehensively. It was as if an icy breath had stolen in from the open window. My hall room was never very warm and it was a sunless day; but I did not attribute the sudden lowering of my temperature to such natural causes. Something more subtle affected me, and I closed my spinet with a nervous tremor. The quaint minor tune went on singing in my head all day, however, and I certainly did not find it a pill to purge melancholy. On the contrary, an unwonted melancholy seized me, and I badly needed some 'electuary' that my old books warranted for cheering the heart and driving away 'all manner of witchcraft.'

IV

Towards evening low growls of thunder in the distance grew louder and a storm came on quickly after sunset. I braced myself to endure some wretched hours, for a thunderstorm affects me abominably. I hate any sudden noise, indeed *any* noise, and the flash of lightning always seems to stop my heart. After it I hold my breath, waiting for the crash to follow. A sickening headache is the immediate result of this tension and a state of exhaustion succeeds it. Sally knows my weakness and after one horrible flash and smash she came to me with the offer of her company, an offer I gladly accepted.

Sally has no objection to thunder or lightning and can prattle through it unconcerned, unless an extra loud detonation gives her a moment's pause. While I lay in a long low chair, back to the windows, with a handkerchief over my eyes and Pomander on my knees, she discoursed pleasantly on village affairs, recorded all the gossip collected by Mabel and detailed to her during their hours of work. I'm afraid I did not pay much attention to her words while the storm was raging at its worst; but when there was time between the peals to take in what she was saying I learnt something of the Rector and his sister, whom I had not yet seen.

"Mr. Courtney-Smith," I became aware she was saying, "is quite a nice gentleman at heart, I'm told, but rather inclined to neglect the parish in the way of calls and being late for funerals, on account of his gardening. Some people say he thinks more of vegetables than he does of human souls, but that may be only chin-wagging. People *will* talk, but I don't hold with such tales about speritooal pastors and masters, myself——"

A long volley of thunder made me shudder and miss the next few sentences. Then I heard:

"—— folks likes him better than Miss 'Arriet, anyway. She does his visiting for him and the people aren't very glad to see her, because she never leaves nothing behind her, 'cept good advice and the parish magazine. Not like the ladies at the Bede House, who *are* ladies and no mistake. They never give themselves no airs, but always have a

kind word for everyone and no fault-finding. Mabel says they never hear of a new baby but they don't take it a little cap, or shoes, or shawl, with nice things to eat for the mother; and when anyone's ill they go and sit with 'em when the nurse goes out, and make beef tea and chicken broth and things for 'em. They know everybody and calls 'em all by their Christen names, which of course Miss 'Arriet doesn't, she not having been here only a few years, and besides she hasn't the way with her as Miss Felicity and Miss Prudence has—all haffable and friendly-like, and taking interest in their family affairs. Miss 'Arriet she is always talking about the Rector this and the Rector that, and what the Rector thinks. She told Mabel's mother as the Rector hadn't been used to a poor common parish like this, but one where there's been a lot of rich gentry round. I s'pose he was a curate then "—Sally interpolated sapiently—" and he was really shocked to see the way some people kept their cottages—as if he'd ever had to live on sixteen shillings a week and seven children! It might've set 'em agin the Rector, ony they knew it wasn't him really said it, ony she made it up. And once——"

A vivid zigzag flash, followed by crackling thunder, shook the house and I shook with it. Pomander jumped off my lap and squeezed himself under the dresser, to hide.

" That was a nasty one," observed Sally. " As I was saying—once Miss 'Arriet told Mrs. Mee the

Rector had said something about her and she went to him and asked if it was true and he said it wasn't and she told Miss 'Arriet and she went to give the Rector a bit of her mind and he give it her back, and the girl was in the kitchen heard it and she told Mrs. Mee and she let Miss 'Arriet 'ave it the next time she seen her—*Hot!*"

This dialectic feat left Sally a little breathless, when she had concentrated quite a number of dropped aspirates into the last word; but she was up and on again before the next flash of lightning.

"But you might call the Miss Heathers the presiding deeties of this village," she declared. "What with libraries and clubs for the young fellers and girls, with evening classes for this, that and the other, and mothers' meetings—— My! it's like the Day of Judgment!"—this in reference to another mighty crash—"but as I was saying, Miss Val, them ladies do work hard for the good of the village and when they dies there will be such a funeral as you never see; they're that poplar. Mrs. Mee was ony saying yesterday that she, for one, would spend her last shilling on a wreath, if she had to starve for it."

Before I could express any opinion upon Mrs. Mee's declaration of self-sacrificing devotion, Sally was on her feet with an exclamation of horror.

"Oh lor!" she cried, "if the rain isn't coming in at the door!"

She pointed to a dark line creeping from under the screen and was off to the kitchen like a shot, for

cloths to stop it. The disadvantage of having a step down into one's hall struck me for the first time and I realised that the privilege of living in a quaint old house is not unalloyed. There seemed no reason why I should not be drowned out in the winter, when accumulated snow should melt outside my doors. The thought added another layer to the weight under which the storm had stifled me, and my depression increased. Sally lighted the lamps, when she had sopped up the rain with several cloths and rolled up a big kitchen towel at the foot of the door. By that time the storm had passed over us, and, although it rumbled away in the distance for another hour or two, did not return.

V

I felt nervous and unstrung when we climbed the stone staircase to bed, and every sound made me jump. I fancied mice and rats in the wainscoting for the first time, and prepared for a miserable night of listening. We had, it is true, seen no evidence of these nocturnal creatures, so far, and the agent had assured me that there were none. But an old, old house without mice in it seems impossible to the imagination, and I was always suspecting their existence. Every creak of the woodwork suggested a little hidden watcher, ready to steal out. Pomander would certainly have him, if he did; but I didn't want Pomander to have him. His ways with a mouse are far too suggestive of the

Inquisition, and I always hate him when he catches one.

For an hour or so I lay in that condition called by old writers 'exquisite sensibility,' listening for thunder, listening for mice, listening for I know not what. And then I heard something!

It stole on my exposed ear very faintly at first and I thought it might be subjective—the sort of singing that goes on in one's ears after practising vocal exercises, or hearing a great noise. But as I listened more intently, and uncovered both ears, my heart began to beat faster and breath grew short. For it was a thin sweet wail of melody that stole out of the silence, something like the delicate, timorous sound of an æolian harp in the air. And I found myself setting words to it, the words in the old book I had found that morning:

Alas! poor shepherd,
Alack and well-a-day!
Before I fell in love, O!
Every month was May.

The minor cadence of the last line died away in a little gust of air that rattled my casement, and I told myself that it must have been the rising wind in my keyhole which I had formed into a tune and set to words. But again the plaintive sound floated through the room in clear, though faint melody, and it was so undeniably that of a reed or wooden instrument that my skin grew clammy and I trembled with strange fear. It was not near, but came from somewhere in the garden or road outside.

When we were children my father used to take the pith from a shoot of the elder tree and fashion it, with a tongue of pith, into a whistle that produced just that thin, windy pipe. My heart pumped faster, and I was beginning to feel faint when another sound challenged the ghostly one and I heard the church clock solemnly striking twelve. The cocks at the nearest farm crowed and everything was instantly normal. No wonder it has been always believed that

> Wandering shadows, ghastly pale,
> All troop to their infernal jail
> Each fettered ghost slips to his several grave

at cockcrow; for surely there is no more earthly and prosaic noise than the strident call of the rooster. No self-respecting spirit could endure it for a moment! I detest it usually, but just then my heart went out in gratitude to the homely barn-door autocrat. I turned on my pillow, laughed at my own fancies and went to sleep.

CHAPTER VII

I

I THOUGHT it best not to tell Sally about my nocturnal experience. She had heard the legend of the shepherd and manifested considerable interest in it, but I had no desire to have my contribution added to the village store of tattle, and I knew Sally could not resist talking of it to Mabel if I told her. The gentle ghost of Shepherd's Delight had not scared anyone lately and it were best not to reawaken any superstitious fears. But I was haunted by the sound of that mysterious piping, and although I told myself that it had been simply my own imagination, I could not shake off the impression that it was an echo from the past.

After breakfast I took down Myer's *Human Personality* from its shelf in the ante-room and read the chapter on Phantasms of the Dead, which always fascinates me.

"Instead of describing a 'ghost' as a dead person permitted to communicate with the living," he says, "let us define it as a manifestation of persistent personal energy, or as an indication that some kind of force is being exercised after death which is, in some way, connected with a person previously known on earth. . . . This force or

influence, which, after a man's death, creates a phantasmal impression of him, may indicate no continuing action on his part, but may be some residue of the force or energy he generated when alive."

Or, he suggests: "There is something in the haunted building itself—some subtle, physical influence—which produces in the brain that effect which, in its turn, becomes the cause of hallucination."

I could easily believe that of my old inn. The very name of it is a suggestion, and hallucination is fed by suggestion. I comforted myself with that word 'hallucination' until I remembered that it was the high road to madness. Better hear, or even see, a real ghost, than make him up in one's brain, I concluded, since that is a first sign of disease. The whole matter was disquieting and I could not rest till I had taken it to the Heathers.

They laughed away my fears, especially Prudence, who is practical and full of common-sense. "If it's the ghost, why did you not hear him before you found the old song?" she asked pertinently, and I had no answer. Felicity found one, however. "Perhaps the song, sung to the spinet, evoked the ghost," she suggested, but not seriously. They both thought my fancy was responsible, and I came away comforted.

II

I spent most of my morning weeding the rock garden that lay on the right-hand side of the path

to the front door. There appeared to be more weeds than flowers in it, and, so far, Jolly had left it severely alone, probably as beneath his attention. The saxifrages had held their own and appropriated a good half of the space at command. Little tufts of rock rose, heath and thyme pushed up among the groundsel and chickweed; violets had a bed to themselves under the window and sweetened the March air with the wonderful perfume that always seems to me the very essence of earth and grass. Tiny pansies, the real love-in-idleness that Puck found for Oberon, bloomed here and there, with 'lady smocks all silver white,' and thrift and candytuft. I didn't know all the plants, as I have never had a rock garden before, so had to be careful not to stub up some precious Alpine or Thibetan exile in my weeding.

How I love the scent of thyme! It is a shame we have connected it with forcemeat balls and cooked meats. It should call up fairies, not food. For it was once held to possess the magic power of rendering fairies visible. In one of my old books there is a recipe for an eye wash to enable one to see fairies, in which thyme is the principal ingredient, with buds of marigold, hollyhock and hazel. Evidently Shakespeare knew of its magic when he made the bank of wild thyme and violets a bed for the fairy queen.

Some day I will have a herb garden, on the old model; with banks of thyme and moss in which seats are fashioned, and a high yew hedge with

windows cut in it, wherein shall grow nothing but the fragrant-leaved things our ancestors knew, but which are by us neglected. And I will not forget Bacon's advice, " to set whole alleys with those herbs which perfume the air most delightfully, not passed by as the rest, but being trodden upon and crushed—burnet, wild thyme and watermints," so, as he adds, " to have the pleasure when you walk or tread."

Bacon's essay on gardens is a sheer delight to me and I almost know it by heart. But I cannot always verify his statements. He says that strawberry leaves, dying, have a most excellent cordial smell, which I have never been able to discover. Perhaps he meant the wild strawberry. And what has become of the double white violet which comes twice a year? I have never seen or heard of it. But how true it is that " the breath of flowers is far sweeter in the air (where it comes and goes like the warbling of music) than in the hand," and that roses are such " fast flowers of their smells that you may walk by a whole row of them and find nothing of their sweetness, yea, though it be in a morning's dew "; whereas " sweetbriar, wallflowers and honeysuckle woo you with their sweet breath as you pass by them, especially at eventide."

I think I will have my herb garden in the Hermes Court, as I call it; the little grass square, walled in by yew, into which my glass door leads. And it shall be the home of all the sturdy fragrant things our fathers loved and our mothers used for soups

and 'sallets,' salves and simples, distilled waters and pomander balls. Lavender, rosemary and lad's love shall be what Sally calls 'the presiding deeties,' with balm and borage, sage and fennel, mint and marjoram, parsley, rue, hyssop, chervil, thyme and those things whose names are music—angelica, vervain, mallow, marigold, basil, betony, clary and coriander. In the middle I will have my little Hermes in a ring of grass, set with bulbs, and the rest of the lawn shall be cut into paths about the herb beds. Already I can see my herb garden to be!

III

I had two callers that afternoon. The first was Miss Courtney-Smith, the Rector's sister, and she presented herself at three o'clock, just as I was in the most delicious chapter of Murray Gilchrist's last novel. It was like stepping from a scented garden into a back-yard!

Miss Courtney-Smith is rather a large person with a round face and a figure square as a chest of drawers. She was attired in the regulation coat and skirt of country life, apparently constructed by the village dressmaker. The skirt was long and did not hang straight; the coat was tight and wrinkled at the armpits; the colour was a hideous shade of dark mustard.

"I hope I am not too early, Miss Prescott," she said, with a wide and bland smile, "and that you are prepared to receive visitors. I did not call

sooner in case you should not be quite settled. My brother, the Rector, requested me to tender you his welcome to the village and say that he will call on the first opportunity. He is, as you will readily understand, a very busy man. This is a large parish, for a village, and his duties keep him constantly employed—to say nothing of his garden, in which he maintains health by physical exercise—er—er——"

She paused for a second, slightly out of breath; and I began:

"Yes, I have heard——" but she did not permit me to continue.

"Everyone knows, of course, what a good gardener he is, and how he takes all the prizes at the village shows round. Such a good example for the cottagers—er—er. And I hear you are fond of gardening too, Miss Prescott, like our dear friends, the Misses Heather. It is a charming hobby, I always think, gardening. I love flowers myself. And I think the love of flowers runs in families, don't you? Our cousin, the Dean of Torminster, is quite an expert in gardening. His roses are wonderful and he employs three men. My uncle, his father, knew Dean Hole intimately. And Lord Billing, his nearest neighbour at Torminster, and *great* friend, always says that he has never seen such fine roses as my cousin grows—he he. My brother, the Rector, does not cultivate flowers so much, although, of course, he is very fond of them in their place—that is, in the front garden or on the pergolas—

er—er—but he has not that—I might almost call it *passion* for flowers that our cousins at Torminster have. When I say 'cousins' I include the Dean's wife. She was a Tomblin—with a b, you know—one of the Dorset Tomblins, relations of Lord Arnold. I daresay you've heard of him—he he."

I said that I had not, and did not happen to know any lords. She smiled upon me with an air of pitying condescension. Indeed her smile was a fixture, and did not vary a fraction of an inch during the whole interview.

"Well, that is not your fault, of course," she observed. "You have not been so fortunate as to have been thrown with the English aristocracy, perhaps. Few of us are. I always find them charming, myself. Lord Billing, for example. I met him at a garden party given by our cousin, the Dean, and found him perfectly delightful to talk to; so free and easy and pleasant. His wife, poor thing, is unable to accompany him into society. She hardly ever goes out, being a great sufferer from an incurable complaint. So sad for her—he he."

The little giggle, coming upon such a statement, afflicted me with a most unruly desire to laugh, and I was thankful that Sally came in with the tea at that moment.

Miss Courtney-Smith's pause did not last half a minute. She went on hurriedly, as if afraid I might snatch the conversation from her: "When I heard

your name, Miss Prescott, I wondered if you might be any relation of the Vaughan-Prescotts, an old Somersetshire family. When I was with the Daubenys in London, some years ago, whose uncle by marriage was a very dear friend of Sir Plymouth Rock, who married the widow of an American millionaire—so nice for him, he he—and made such a name with her money—racehorses and so forth—er—er—well, as I was saying, when I stayed with them I met some Vaughan-Prescott's, and I wondered if they might be connections of yours in any way."

I resisted a mischievous inclination to invent a long line of patrician ancestry, and the effort carried me to the further extreme.

"I'm afraid I cannot lay claim to that honour," I said. "Our family has always lived in the Midlands, and we boast no aristocratic connections. Indeed my father's sister married a pork butcher."

This fiction came to my lips before I had time to reflect on its indiscretion; it was irresistible and I could not regret it when I saw the shocked expression in her faded blue eyes. It filled me with unsanctified glee; but did not affect her smile as she proceeded to make kind excuses for my aunt's imaginary misalliance.

"Oh, well," she said: "such things do happen in the best-regulated families, we know, he he! Very trying for your father, though. I am sure he was a gentleman."

There was a brief interrogative pause, and I knew she was mutely asking me to state my father's calling. But I quenched a wild desire to say that he kept a public-house and merely smiled, as blandly and blankly as she smiled at me. She did not wait many moments before resuming her monologue.

I settled myself in my chair, inwardly longing for the pen of Jane Austen, and wondering how long she would stay. For once I blessed the convention of a short first call, concluding that a lady so accustomed to the very best society would depart after consuming a cup of tea and a wafer of bread and butter. But I did not know Miss Courtney-Smith, or the custom of the country. Calls were, I was to discover, conducted on an almost religious ideal of neighbourliness and it was considered neighbourly to give long measure to the poor stranger, who must find time hang very heavily upon her. The garrulous lady drank two cups of tea and ate a large number of little cakes, besides cress sandwiches and bread and butter, talking all the time. Her tepid voice trickled on and on till I thought it would never stop. When Sir Charles Pomander sauntered in with his tail up and asked for milk, I hoped he might create a diversion; but no, she only regarded him as a peg upon which to hang the taste of her cousin, the Dean, who did not like cats, and of the Hon. Somebody Tomblin, who did.

It was the same when she admired my Broadwood and 'presumed' that I played it. Before I could

reply she was informing me that her cousin, the Dean's eldest daughter, played beautifully and how very musical the Dean himself was.

She took her leave at last, just before five o'clock, and 'silence, like a poultice, came to heal the blows of sound,' for her toneless voice, with its continual 'he he,' had got on my nerves and I wanted to scream. As soon as the door had closed upon her, I sat down to my piano and expressed my violent irritation in a Liszt Rhapsody. I played it ferociously, at a tempo faster than I had ever played it before, till the gunpowder ran out of the heels of my shoes; which is to say, till I had completely worked off Miss Courtney-Smith and her cousin, the Dean.

I finished, hot and breathless, to hear a voice at my window. I turned and saw José Wakelyn's dark head looking in.

"Topping!" she said, with her boyish grin. "I've heard it all through, Miss Prescott, and my aunt! you did give it gyp! May I come in, or have you had enough visitors for one day?"

I welcomed her and rang for a fresh pot of tea.

"I called at a more civilised hour," she said, as I opened the front door and she bumped down the step, as everyone does—and I do myself; "but before I rang the bell, luckily, I heard a familiar sound and bolted! I went for a walk and then hid in your garden till I heard her go. I thought she meant to spend the rest of the day here! Isn't

she a gas-bag? I suppose she did not, by any chance, mention her cousin, the——"

"Oh, don't!" I exclaimed, and we laughed together. "I was feeling rather—full," said I, "before I gave way to Liszt. He allays irritation as no one else can, I find. Now I'm better and ready for more tea."

"You should have taken a nap," suggested José. "I always do when she gets going on the Duke of Plaza Toro and that ilk. So long as you don't snore, she doesn't notice."

"No doubt she is a very good soul," I remarked, thinking of the Heathers, and trying to take a leaf out of their book of golden charity.

"Oh, no doubt," said the girl, with a mocking laugh. "They all are. And I may tell you I've saved you from another D.B. this afternoon."

I asked for an explanation of those cryptic letters.

"Deadly Bore," she replied. "The woods are full of them round here, though few are as deadly as Happy Harriet. The one I choked off was my aunt, Mrs. Fortescue, who abides under our hospitable roof and is supposed to chaperone me. I told her I was coming, so she must choose another day. Be prepared for the worst, therefore. Perhaps you could manage not to be at home."

"But I should like to see Mrs. Fortescue."

"Oh no, you wouldn't," said José calmly. "She'll bore you to tears. Talks of nothing but Food and Servants and the way the village girls dress. But

I won't prejudice you against her. She's really quite a dear, when you know her and don't have to listen to her. Do you play bridge, by the way?"

"Indifferent well."

"That's all right. You'll have to come and make up four with us, as often as possible. We play cut-throat every night, nearly, and it's like sheep-shearing—Aunty being the sheep. She never gets a chance of playing dummy, because Teddy or I always snaffle it. You'd think she wouldn't play; but she doesn't seem to mind in the least. That's the best of sheep. They're so amiable."

I asked who Teddy was and learnt that he was her father.

"The nicest boy you ever knew, a real Peter Pan who will never grow up. I call him Peter sometimes. You'll come often, won't you, and play with us? It will be a charity. And he wants to know you. You may marry him—if you can."

I laughed. "What a challenge! It implies that my charms are insufficient."

"I didn't mean that. I'm sure you could be downright deadly if you chose. But Teddy's fairly invulnerable by now. Every woman within a radius of twenty miles has had a shot at him—and missed. That's why I give you leave to try. Only you'll find me rather a handful, if you succeed."

"Forewarned is forearmed, Miss Wakelyn."

"Oh, don't call me that. I'm José, or Jo, to

everybody; even to the villagers, behind my back."

"That's what seems to me so charming about this village," I said, "there seems such a *rapport* between all the people in it, rich and poor. In the last village I stayed in, not far from London, there were two distinct communities living side by side and never touching. The dwellers in the big houses, mostly *nouveau riche*, appeared to be quite unaware of the cottagers' existence. Nothing was done to make life any brighter for the poor people, who had a dull, grovelling sort of time, while the others were very gay among themselves. One heard their carriages driving about half the night. But the only amusement for the villagers was the public-house, and there was one every few yards. I believe there were thirteen of 'em in a village half the size of this! Here it is very different."

"Rather! This is a real village; that must have been an artificial one. But I should prefer it, myself. There must have been more to do than in this hole, and everybody wouldn't have a finger in your pie. I always feel a sort of common property, as if everybody had rights in me. I'm sure they think they have, and I'm 'our Josie' to most of them. I say—I wish you'd sing me one of your songs. I've heard one on the gramophone and it was top-hole. Do you sing?"

"Do you remember what it was?"

"Something about starlight and dew."

"It's horribly sentimental. You won't like it."

"That's where you make a mistake. I'm the most sentimental ass."

I sang *Jasmine Nights* and she took a seat nearer the piano to listen.

Into the night I'm gazing,
  Starlight and dew,
Thinking of last year's summer,
  Dreaming of you;
Breathing the jasmine fragrance
  As when we said adieu,
Thrilling with old sweet glamour—
  Old, yet so new.

Starlight and scent of jasmine,
  Silence and dew
Bring back those hours of rapture—
  Hours that flew.
Into the night I'm gazing;
  Ah, if you knew
How I am dreaming, and longing
  For you!

When I had finished she exclaimed: "Thanks, awfully; it's perfectly sweet. I can't think how you do it;" but I saw that she was thinking of something else and her eyes were fixed on Clive's photograph, facing her from the piano.

"Who's this beamish boy?" she asked, taking it up for closer inspection. I told her it was my brother.

"Now, how very nice of you to have a naval brother!" she ejaculated. "All my life I've been looking for girls with naval brothers, and here you

come along and provide one. I adore the Navy and every man in it. They're so smart and sporting. The only man I ever really loved was a sailor. He danced like a cherub. Your brother looks a perfect pink. What's his name? I expect he's younger than you."

"His name is Clive, and yes, he's four years younger than I am—the baby of the family."

"He's rather like you—the same dark eyes. And is his hair golden, like yours?"

"No; he's not a sandy man. Thank you for calling it 'golden.' The boys used to call me 'carrots.'"

She fixed Monday night for me to dine at the Hall and chattered on merrily. I found her very good company, and her cigarettes were mild. Perhaps the subtle flattery she offered in treating me as a girl of her own age had its due effect. I must be eight or ten years older than she, and we certainly have nothing in common. She obviously ignores, or despises, everything I like best—music, poetry, flowers. The great bowl of wallflowers that stood, a gorgeous flare of colour, against my blue curtains by the window, the yellow tulips in a silver vase on my piano, she did not, I am sure, even see; and I doubt if she really heard my song—except in the way that Sally hears barking dogs and crowing cocks. The books she reads would not have satisfied me at twelve years old! I liked her and she amused me, but I could not help thinking of Thackeray's words: "A distinct universe walks about under your hat

and under mine. You and I are but a pair of infinite isolations, with some fellow-islands more or less near to us." José was a ' fellow-island ' rather a long way off, and yet we were within calling distance. I cannot say as much for my first visitor.

CHAPTER VIII

I

For days I have been haunted by a poem I want to set to music. The rhythm of its lovely words has lilted in my ears, but I could not decide on its melodic form. I have two precious little books by Andrew Lang, *Ballads in Blue China* and *Rhymes à la Mode*, and the last 'Rhyme' is this exquisite lyric:

My heart's an old spinet with strings
To laughter chiefly tuned, but some
That Fate has practised hard on, dumb.
They answer not whoever sings.
The ghosts of half-forgotten things
Will touch the keys with fingers numb,
The little mocking spirits come
And thrill it with their fairy wings.

A jingling harmony it makes,
My heart, my lyre, my old spinet,
And now a memory it wakes,
And now the music means 'forget,'
And little heed the player takes
Howe'er the thoughtful critic frets.

To me it seems perfect up to the last line, when the 'thoughtful critic' intrudes into a magic circle. But it is extremely difficult to find the right music for it, music that will not mar its beauty. Perhaps

it is beyond my small powers. When I attempt anything ambitious the result is usually a depressing sense of my limitations. I would suggest the past, the tinkling old instrument in a tender little tune, but so far I have succeeded only in a sentimental minor melody. When I try to be original I become merely—modern! And this song must not be modern. It should not even be subtle; it should only be simple. Why is it so hard to be simple? And why do we *try* to be original?

When Purcell wrote his *Nymphs and Shepherds* one may be sure that there was no thought of trying to be original in his mind. That mind lent its fresh colour to all he wrote. And if the gods have not given us that individual colour, all our striving won't produce it. By attempting to be different from others we can only make confused patterns and obtain distressing effects. The old fable of the frog and the ox contains a sound lesson for those who are bitten by the tarantula of unwarranted ambition. And yet we all—we who are conscious of creative power, however puny—believe that by aiming at a star we may get over a tree! Instead of being content with our little gift, as Herrick was when he wrote:

> A little Hearth best fits my little Fire
> A little Chapel fits a little Choir
> As my small Bell best fits my little Spire—

we try to lift ourselves above the pigmy crowd by absurd stretching and antics; with woeful results.

I groaned in spirit over my spinet song, realising but too well that it ought not to be a matter of travail but of inspiration. For if such lines fail to inspire one, no amount of travail can succeed, and the little trembling spark of Promethean fire within is worthless.

I gave it up at last, in despair. "My small bell best fits a little spire," I muttered, and resolved to write my own feeble words for my petty music. A humiliating conclusion, but honest, and I felt the better for it.

It was raining, but I put on a mackintosh and oilskin cap and sallied forth in the rain, to work off my disappointment and irritation. I had been sitting for hours by the fire, with sheets of music-paper on a writing-board set on my knees, and wasted sheets all round me. My head felt as if it were stuffed with cotton wool, my eyes ached and my temper demanded something to kick! I had treated Pomander rudely when he offered his soft comfort. Suddenly aware of all these things, I felt the need for immediate action.

It had been wet more or less all day, but the sky was growing lighter when I started and presently the rain ceased, while the sun began to glow mistily in the west, like a veiled rose. I walked towards it, humming my tune and thinking of nothing. The beauty of the dripping hedgerows, a shimmer of burnished green; the sudden chorus of delighted birds; the sight of a comic little rabbit, with one ear cocked, lol-lolloping across the muddy road;

the delicious odours of wet earth and hedges; the different shades of jade and beryl, olive and sage in the green woods; the lambs leaping in the fields; blue distance and purple clouds—all combined to lift my heart and make my steps light. I wanted to sing with the birds and skip with the lambs. How funnily they do it, all four legs at once! A farmer passed me in his dog-cart and raised his hat. I didn't know him but he seemed to be a friend. I was probably smiling when he passed and he accepted the smile. There was a fine golden dust cast by the sinking sun about the woods, changing their tint every minute. Leaning over a gate I watched the gold fade, and then, becoming aware that I was hungry, turned to go back.

Suddenly, and for no apparent reason, something floated into my mind, something I had sought for days in vain: a little strain of melody, with its harmonies, the musical expression I had sought in vain for my spinet song. I drew a long breath of rapture. All my virtuous humility vanished. All my hopes and aspirations revived. The setting of my song, with its quaint accompaniment, stood out before me as clearly as if it had been painted on the twilight air. I hurried home, threw off my coat and seized pencil and paper again, fearful of losing a note before I could set it down.

Sally had laid the table for dinner and lighted the lamp upon it. She heard me come in, and, a few minutes later, brought in my dishes. At the sight

of me, squatting by the fire and writing feverishly, she stood transfixed.

"Good lawks, Miss Val!" she ejaculated. "Why, whatever are you——"

"Go away!" I commanded fiercely. "Don't speak to me—don't bring food near me. Get out, Sally, or I shall certainly brain you."

"Well!" she gasped and further speech was paralysed. She withdrew hastily.

It did not take very long to imprison my precious inspiration in notes, but the effort exhausted me and I leant back in my chair feeling faint and giddy. When Sally poked her head in again, somewhat timorously, she found me looking so white that her first severe sentence died on her lips.

"If you ain't gone quite stark staring, Miss——" she began; and then: "My goodness! Miss Val, you do look done up. Are you ill?"

I knew it was no good trying to explain, so I merely said, faintly:

"No. I'm all right, Sally, only starving."

Her face changed again.

"Your dinner's all spoilt," she said severely. "Such a nice dish of sweetbreads as I'd got yer, and rhubarb tart and all. I dunno how you think things can be kept 'ot without spoiling. And me, after waiting and waiting and wondering what's 'appened to you, to be spoke to like a dog and told as I should be brained!"

Her tone of injury was too much for me. I collapsed in helpless laughter.

"Oh, Sally, I thought you could take a joke," I said, reproachfully.

The lines of self-pity in her face relaxed.

"Well, you always was a funny one," she said, with a reluctant grin: "I suppose it's the way of people who make things up out of their own 'eads. They get a bit addled by it sometimes."

I agreed and we left it at that.

II

The next day was Sunday, my third Sunday in Woodside, and I thought it time to make an appearance in church. It was a faery morning, veiled in almost imperceptible mist, tinted with gold. Garden and orchard were in bridal white, with here and there a rosy flush of apple buds just breaking. In corners of the front garden the *Pirus Malus Floribunda* and Snowy *Mespilus* flowered like wonderful bouquets, without a hint of green amid their masses of bloom; the wild apple all dainty pink, the *Mespilus* silver white. Among their branches and about the golden leopard's bane, wallflower and purple honesty the bees were murmuring, while butterflies, white, brown, blue, fluttered on the same errand. As I trod the flags of my garden path the crushed thyme sent up its homely fragrance, and at the gate I was met by a whiff of sweetbrier.

I attired myself, as I thought, suitably for this festive May morning; that is, in a creamy voile frock and brown hat. Persons born with my

coloured hair have to be very careful what they wear, and I am restricted to soft tones of grey, mole, brown and, of course, cream or yellow. Even white makes my hair shriek! I occasionally break out into dull greens, pale shades of blue and orange, but only for evening. I was satisfied with my appearance, after a final glance at my looking-glass, and felt that May need not be ashamed of me. But when I walked in at the lych gate among the other church-goers and saw the glances that fell upon me, a misgiving crept into my mind; to be emphasised as I walked up the aisle and was shown into a pew. There was something in the stares I received that gave me a slight sense of discomfort; a certain eagerness in the eyes of the village girls and glances of disapprobation from the farmers' wives made me feel suddenly over-dressed. It did not require much perspicacity to note that every woman with any pretence of gentility wore a dingy coat and skirt, while all the village maidens supplied the colour and the spring whiteness whose fashion was set by the trees outside.

The stares and nudges about me suggested that I was a spectacle, and it is not pleasant to be a spectacle. I grew hot with a rising tide of anger and rebellion, resolving that I would not come to church again if I could not wear what I liked in it. I dislike myself in the conventional coat and skirt, with its stiff and manly lines, its stereotyped convention, which suit me ill. I am not pretty, but I can be dainty and distinctive, so why should I try

to appear commonplace? The woman who has to go out and earn her living is obliged to adopt a utilitarian kind of uniform, but why should I? Looking critically at José Wakelyn and the farmers' wives and daughters in their correct tailor-mades; then from them to the village girls in their gay white or coloured frocks, I decided that the latter showed the best taste. They brightened the grey old church; they were in tune with the exquisite May morning, the blue sky, the snowy trees, the delicate tracery of green leaves, the gold and blue and pink and mauve flowers. Some of their colours were crude and their arrangement inharmonious, of course; but most of the pretty young faces, rosy with health, looked charming under their broad-brimmed flowery hats, and if all the frocks were not well made, they showed a feeling for colour that, to my mind, is a good sign—a sign of vitality and æsthetic craving. I envied one dark girl in a delicious pink hat, wreathed with apple blossom. It was a cheap hat, and the flowers on it were cheap, but the shade was the pure pink of the sweetbrier rose, and oh, how delectable it was! like a lovely bit of melody or something very good to eat. I always regret that I cannot wear pink. It is the true Arcadian colour.

These reflections spoilt the service for me, and I did not enter into it with any devotional spirit. There was much to challenge criticism in the service, from the droning voice of Mr. Courtney-Smith to the wheezy old organ and atrocious singing of the

choir. The country choir boy, I have observed, has but one idea of singing—to make as much noise as he can; and so the sound he produces is a kind of shout, that cracks on any note above D. It is not singing at all, in fact, and I can't think why choir-masters tolerate it when it is so easy to train a boy's fresh voice. One has only to make them practise downwards, instead of upwards, starting their scales on high notes.

When we came out of church I walked home with the Heathers, who asked me to go and see their new rock plant, a tiny thing with a name as long as my arm. It was just showing its first dainty bloom, and Felicity stooped over it adoringly.

But I was full of my grievance, and, at her first general remark upon the beauty of the morning and the radiant spring colouring, I asked: "Why is it that, when Nature sets such an example of brilliant hues, human beings try to make themselves as dull and ugly as possible? I'm sure I shocked the whole congregation this morning by appearing in cream colour. You were all in coats and skirts—all the *élite*, I mean. But I warn you, I am not going to be dominated by the conventional; I'm going to be a gaudy butterfly, with the village damsels. Do you think me very dreadful?"

They laughed, their sweet, indulgent laugh.

"Dreadful! Why, you look lovely," said Felicity. "I am sure everyone admired your pretty frock and hat, with your pretty self in it. We did, anyhow; didn't we, Prue?"

"Of course. I've often thought it a pity that people put on such dull clothes to go to church in," her sister agreed. "I suppose it is a way we've got into, with the idea of discouraging the village girls from spending all their money on dress. But it is certainly a wasted effort. They don't copy us!"

"It's so natural for them to love pretty things and bright colours," added Felicity; "and to wear them in church is perhaps their way of honouring and worshipping God, Who gave us such a beautiful world to live in."

"Don't you think," I asked, "that by wearing stiff and sober garments at church some unco' guid folk think to show off their superiority and form an extra barrier between themselves and what they call 'the lower orders'?"

The sisters did not reply for a moment. Then Prudence began hesitatingly: "Well—perhaps—but——" and was interrupted by Felicity, who said earnestly: "Oh no, my dear Miss Prescott; you mustn't think that of any of our friends here. They are all so nice."

I found, in that mild protest, the keynote of her character. She was utterly incapable of a harsh thought, an unkind criticism. I was never to hear from her lips, or from her sister's, a judgment that was uncharitable, a word even of just censure. Disapproval with them was ever marked by silence.

They made me a little ashamed, and I was glad of a diversion when Bulbul marched up to me, with a business-like air, and rubbed his silvery fluff against

my skirts. It was a hint I was not slow to take, knowing cat methods of suggestion. Had not Sir Charles Pomander dealt the same gentle hint to visitors who stayed too near the dinner hour? I recollected that Prudence had a Bible Class early in the afternoon, and took my leave quickly.

III

The almond scent beneath my big cherry tree in the back garden is delicious. I took out a chair and sat under it that afternoon, with Chaucer. I suppose it is the *Canterbury Tales* that always connects Chaucer with the spring. What fun it must have been, ambling on a palfrey to Canterbury with all sorts of amusing people when "Aprille with its showres swote" filled all the air with perfume and all the grass with daisies. But it was the *Romaunt of the Rose* I read this afternoon, to the soft murmuring of bees in the cherry blossom, and for a description of May, surely the opening cannot be beaten.

> That it was May, thus dremede me,
> In tyme of love and jolite,
> That al thing gynneth waxen gay,—
> And than bycometh the ground so proude
> That it wole have a newe shroude,
> And maketh so queynt his robe and faire
> That it had hewes an hundred payre
> Of gras and flowris, ynde and pers,
> And many hewes ful dyvers :

That is the robe I mene, iwis
Through which the ground to preison is.
. . . . . .
Hard is the hert that loveth naught
In May, whan al this mirth is wroughte.

Surely Chaucer was the first 'nature poet,' and he must have loved May better than any other month. There is something in his poetry that wafts me right off the earth. It may be that curiously intoxicating scent of the past which acts like a spell on some of us and is quite imperceptible to others. And thinking thus reminded me of a long-forgotten desire I had to set his exquisite rondel, beginning: "Youre two eyen will sle me sodenly." What a love song they would make! If only one could be as simple and inspired as Purcell! But Purcell seems not to have known Chaucer, and the words of his songs are nearly always inferior to his music.

Chaucer must have charmed me to sleep, as sweet music does, for when Sally came out to know where I would have tea, I had but reached the page where the fair maiden, Ydelnesse, comes into the dream, with Myrthe, the lord of the garden. The sun had slipped behind the cherry tree and I shivered a little.

"If you catch information on the lungs, Miss Val," Sally observed sternly, "don't blame me. 'Cast not a clout till May is out' and here you sit with no coat or rat on, like it was summer."

"Don't scold me, Sally dear; I'm so happy," I said, stretching: "Look at the blue sky through

this silver tree, and be thankful God made you. Hark at that cuckoo, trying to get even with his own rapture, and see how Pomander rolls in the grass. Is it a day for thinking about colds and lungs?"

"You said last week you hated that beastly cuckoo," observed Sally, who looked very smart in her Sunday clothes.

"I did last week. Now I'm getting used to him, when he doesn't come too near. Have you seen my sweet peas? Jolly is going to stick them to-morrow. And that China rose, the first rose of summer."

I rose from my chair and spouted to her from William Morris:

O fair mid-Spring, besung so oft and oft!
How can I praise thy loveliness enow?
Thy sun that burns not and thy breezes soft,
That o'er the flowers of the orchard blow,
The thousand things that 'neath the young leaves grow,
The hopes and chances of the growing year,
Winter forgotten long and summer near.

"Very nice, I'm sure," commented Sally. "I rather like poetry, Miss Val, don't you? When it's not too full of long words."

IV

The Heathers had promised to come to supper with me, after church. Our evening should have

been ideal, with music and talk of books. Felicity and I played some Haydn duets, revelling in the pure melody and delicious modulations; and I sang the songs in the old book I had found, *The Spanish Lady, Farewell, Manchester, Shepherds, have you seen my Pastora? I Sowed the Seeds of Love* and the haunting song of my ghost, *I am a Poor Shepherd Undone.* But when we sat over the log fire, to talk and drink cocoa, afterwards, a jarring note crept into our perfect harmony—in this wise.

We were speaking of the library and the village boys who met three times a week in the club room Prudence has fitted up in an old barn of the Bede House, when she said suddenly:

"I wonder if you would come in sometimes and sing to them, or talk to them about music and books. They would love it."

"Oh, please don't ask me!" I exclaimed quickly, in horror at the thought. "I can't do anything of that kind—I really cannot. In the first place, I am too nervous and stupid. In the second place, I don't want to begin doing things like that, for which I have no vocation. I don't want to be drawn into village affairs, or I shall never get any time to myself."

The sisters were silent. I went on:

"Miss Courtney-Smith asked me if I would take a class in the Sunday School, and I declined flatly. Fancy *me*, with a Sunday School class!"

"The girls would love you," said Felicity, softly. "I hoped you might be persuaded some day; but

not yet. It is too soon to expect you to take an interest in the people."

"You could do so much, with your talent and personality," Prudence suggested. "Your influence would be very valuable."

"Even if I encouraged them to wear fine clothes on Sunday!"

They smiled.

I continued to excuse myself. "Don't think me horrid, but I really can't go in for good works. It isn't my rôle at all. I couldn't give up my time to do what you dear ladies do in the village. I don't love my fellow-creatures enough. And I hate the ugly schoolroom and stuffy cottages, and odour of—of the soap, or something, those people use. Please don't ask me. It is so hard to refuse you anything, after all your gracious kindness to me. I feel a churl."

"My dear, you mustn't feel that," said Felicity, gently, "or distress yourself about it at all. We shall certainly not press you to do anything you don't like. It is your own affair, not ours, and you have a right to regulate your own life as you like."

"I'm afraid we love doing these things ourselves so much that we expect other people to love doing them," added Prudence, with her boyish chuckle. "You see, we've nothing else to do, and so we're busybodies with a finger in many pies. And having lived among the dear people here all our lives, we can't realise that they cannot interest a stranger as

they do us. Don't think any more about it, Valentine. We may call you Valentine, mayn't we? It's such a pretty name. And won't you drop the 'miss' with us too? It seems so formal and unfriendly."

"I should love to. But I won't hear you call yourselves 'busybodies.' I don't know what the village would do without you. I wonder if you know how much you are loved?" And I told them about Mrs. Mee and the wreaths for their prospective graves, at which they laughed heartily.

No more was said on the subject and we parted on affectionate terms. But I knew they had been hurt and disappointed in me. Even the sweetest and least censorious soul cannot disguise those feelings. They would put the most charitable construction possible on my churlish refusal of help, but it must have seemed selfish to them, and my self-esteem withered under the thought.

"I am unworthy of you, Amyas," I muttered to my dream lover that night. "I am a horrid egoist, intent on enjoying life, and nothing else."

The imagined answer: "Darling, I love you whatever you are," did not yield me the satisfaction I intended. Somehow I don't think a woman wants that kind of indiscriminate love. It must cloy. Does she not ask for a keen appreciation of what is best in her? And how can she obtain that if the best be not distinguishable from the worst? I thought of a better answer: "You are not selfish, but do not believe in fussing about other people and inter-

fering in their concerns." Yes, that was a nice comforting response. I did not want to be a 'busybody,' as Felicity called herself. There are plenty of women who enjoy putting fingers into other folks' pies; who delight in 'parish work,' Sunday School teaching, Mothers' Meetings and so forth, as Prudence said she did; with them these are forms of mild diversion. And why should I, who hate the very name of parish work, take it out of their hands? Why should I waste time in dreary schoolrooms, or by sick beds, that I could spend with my precious books, my piano, my garden, my art, and the kingdom of my mind generally? There is room in the world for all kinds of people, and I am of the kind that worships beauty. Let me then dedicate myself to this worship as a devout Catholic does to the contemplation of the divine. I am not like these dear women, or my friend Judith Wills, and cannot find happiness in being useful. I haven't the least desire to be useful. I long passionately to create a work of art, but if I can't do that, I can at least devote myself to the adoration of art and nature. I will not, therefore, choke up all my time with things that any commonplace woman can do better than I can.

Thus I argued with myself, putting this cogent reasoning into the mouth of my lover, and trying to derive comfort from it. But—the truth must be told—*I wriggled*. The opposing force was strong and the throes of indecision made me restless. Until, suddenly, I reflected: if I were really selfish my

egoism would not trouble me; and, upon this, I began to feel drowsy. From the back of my mind a text emerged: "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth."

It is a good text for waverers!

CHAPTER IX

I

NEXT day was soft, after a turbulence of gusty showers. A gentle rain fell at intervals, with sunshine between; the air was balmy and I was in a lazy mood. There was some excuse for not weeding in the damp garden, so, after my morning's practise of vocal and piano exercises, I settled myself in the corner of my big lounge, with two writers who are always scheduled in my mind as grey—Jane Austen and Henry James. They have both so little colour and their effects are produced in a way that suggests the pencil rather than the brush. One has to be in a special mood to enjoy them, and I can never understand why it should be the fashion to rhapsodise over them as if they represented the finest literary art. For although their work is fine in the sense of 'delicate,' it is not great or inspired by deep thought. One soon touches bottom with them. I love Jane for her delicious humour and objective drawings of real human beings. I love Henry for his subjective studies of character and profound subtlety. Jane's style is so perfect as to make one piteously envious. Henry's style is so frequently atrocious as to make one writhe. What can you make of this passage?

"If I, perhaps, questioned whether 'grandmotherly' were exactly the name of the view, what yet, at least, was definite in the light of the evening's arrangement was that there did occur occasions on which they were put apart."

"Occur occasions"! It gives one a shudder down the back. But here is something worse.

"Since you thought Mr. Server was the person whom, when I stopped you, I was sorry to learn from you I had missed. . . ."

"And there was that in one which could let him see he had far from done; and something, above all, told me now that he absolutely mustn't have before I had. I quickly, moreover, saw that I must, with an art, make him not want to."

It reminds one of the Duchess in *Alice in Wonderland* and her speech beginning: "Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others . . ." and so forth. I used to collect gems of this type from Henry James, to chuckle over, until they irritated me. The more because I really love Henry, when he is not affectedly spinning verbal cobwebs over everything he wants to say. And most of all I love his volumes of short stories—*The Beast in the Jungle, The Lesson of the Master* and other delectable works. Why did he ever start trying not to be simple and playing havoc with the language of Shakespeare and Milton? He made himself far too easy to parody, but I think nobody has parodied him so cleverly as H. G. Wells in *Boon*.

I had to choose between Henry and Jane this morning, as I sat with *Northanger Abbey* and *The Ambassadors* beside me; and I chose Jane, because her prose is clear as running water and my mind did not feel alert enough to wade through Henry's foggy parentheses. After lunch I repaired again to *Northanger Abbey* and was enjoying dear Jane's picture of Bath and Society in her day, when a peremptory knocking at my front door disturbed the delicious peace. It was such a determined rat-a-tat-tat-tat that I knew it could have been made by no one but a caller, bent on afternoon tea; probably one from a distance.

As it was a wet day I had not troubled to change my morning gown, and nothing makes one feel so ill-humoured as being caught in shabby attire. My hair was untidy too, as I had been rolling it on a cushion, so that it was with 'ruffled head and rumpled heart' I prepared to meet my visitor. What a shame it is that social conventions should find their way into an Arcadia like this! I thought of Dickens's words: "I am weary of society, despise it, hate it and reject it." And my smile was distinctly forced as I greeted the lady announced as Mrs. Walton.

She was as garrulous as Miss Courtney-Smith, but more rapid in deliverance and without the fixed, bland smile. There was an indefinable air of bustling superiority about her that somewhat detracted from her apologetic remarks. She had been persuaded to call on me by Miss Heather, but

she was sure I did not want callers, and that she had disturbed me during a quiet snooze. She was a very busy woman herself, and never had time for a rest in the day-time, as I would easily understand when she told me that she had six children, an immense number of fowls and a dairy to look after.

"Of course," she continued, in her high-pitched, but not unpleasant, voice, "I have help—two servants—in the house, and the cow-keeper's wife makes the butter; but I have the management and responsibility of everything, and I can assure you, Miss Prescott, that the mother of a large family always has her hands full, especially at holiday times, when all the children are home. I never have a moment to call my own. Once I used to sing and play the piano, and read; but now I never get time for such things. My eldest girl left school at Christmas, and helps me now, so I hope I may get a little more leisure. She is like a little mother to the younger ones, dear child, and I don't know what I should do without her. She is very fond of your songs, Miss Prescott, and wants to know you very badly. I should like you to hear her sing. Everyone says she sings beautifully, but, of course, it is not for me to say so. She gets her voice from my family. We were all singers. My brother had one of the most *lovely* tenor voices I have ever heard. He used to go all over the country singing at concerts, and people said he would have made a fortune if his voice had been properly trained. Linda has already sung at concerts with great success."

She paused for breath and I asked if her daughter had had any training.

"Oh yes, indeed," her mother declared, with emphasis. "We paid two guineas a term extra for her singing last year; so, of course, she has been thoroughly well taught. You must hear her, Miss Prescott, and tell me what you think of her voice, if you will be so good. I shall value your opinion because, being a composer, and all that, you ought to know all about music. We are very plain folk, but if you will come to tea one day soon, we shall be delighted to show you life in a farmhouse."

I told her that I had already sampled life in a farmhouse, and did not add that I had found it anything but agreeable. She was immediately interested and asked a dozen rapid questions about the farm, the people, the land, the district and so on. To my replies she listened with an arrested air of waiting for her next turn to speak. And, at the first opportunity, she plunged in again with more intimate information about her children, evidently expecting me to be as much interested in them as she was herself.

They were very wonderful children, according to her dithyrambics. Charlie, the eldest boy, had taken all his school examinations with flying honours and won a scholarship to Cambridge. He thought of the Science Tripos—"as you know, Miss Prescott, agriculture is becoming a very important science now and the old ideas about land are changing. In my father's time—he was a farmer, Miss Prescott

—the rotation of crops was considered sufficient, but now——" I cannot remember how it went on, though I really could have learnt quite a lot about farming from this good lady. But I grew tired of listening to the cascade of talk about agriculture and Charlie, Jim, Maud and the rest, with my own name dotted in *ad nauseam*, and was very glad when Sally brought in the tea, and I could interrupt, with cakes and bread and butter, the flow of her discourse.

I liked the breezy woman nevertheless. She was, I knew, a nice woman, an admirable woman, genial, kind, capable and bubbling over with good spirits. She could give excellent practical advice upon every subject under the sun, and sympathy in every obvious ill. But I would as soon live with a rattlesnake! Her conversation would drive me crazy in a week. Obsessed by her own absorbing interest in everyday affairs, she had lost all joy in those things that are the essentials of life to me. Only one common sentiment did I find we shared—a dislike of conventionalities.

"I never call but once on a new-comer," she said at parting, "and after that, if we don't get on friendly terms—dropping in at any time on each other—I don't call again, and that's an end of it." I cordially agreed, and inwardly resolved that if the 'dropping in' depended on me, we should see but little of each other.

II

I put on all my glory to dine at the Hall that night, reflecting that there would not be many opportunities of airing my prettiest frocks in Woodside. But when I was shown into the drawing-room and found José in a dark blue silk gown, cut only a little open at the neck, and her aunt in a high black silk, I felt absurdly over-dressed in my tangerine georgette, with underskirt, wide belt and shoulder-straps of dead leaf brown, although it was not very low and had long, transparent sleeves, the fashion of its day. But the Squire, who wore evening dress, evidently regarded me with satisfaction and his glance afforded me some comfort.

A man about forty-eight years of age, inclined to be stout, he had a very young face and I understood José's description of him as ' a nice boy.' He really looked a nice grown-up boy. A small moustache, several shades lighter than his hair, graced his short upper lip, and he had a laughing mouth with white, somewhat crooked teeth. His skin was reddened out of its natural fairness, owing to the outdoor life he led, and his close-cropped, reddish hair had only begun to take on a grey tinge at the roots. José was very much like him, especially in a certain dancing light of the eyes. The impression he made on me was of a man who took life easily, who was content with himself, his lot, his house and the world generally. I concluded that he was a *bon vivant*, probably rather self-indulgent, and that

he would have little interest in life outside his own domain. But before the end of the evening I saw fit to change that opinion. He ate by no means heartily, drank little wine, and his interests appeared to be, in a sense, wide. Although he touched everything lightly, in his agreeably modulated voice, and extracted a laugh from most subjects, it became obvious that he took his duties on the County Council very seriously—at least as seriously as he took his hunting and shooting—and he seemed eager to discuss with me certain educational and social reforms with which my friend, Judith Wills, had made me familiar. Finding him interested, I quoted from some of her last letters and he listened most attentively.

Mrs. Fortescue was quite colourless. She received me with cordiality and retired into herself immediately afterwards. Once or twice during dinner she let fall a remark about the difficulty of obtaining good fish in a village, or the best way of cooking vegetables, or the extravagance of cooks; but, finding that I did not enter enthusiastically into these topics, she soon subsided again and applied herself to the business of eating.

After dinner the Squire followed us into the drawing-room very quickly and proposed a little music before we started our bridge, asking if I had brought any with me.

"In my head," I replied, and was thereupon implored to play something.

The first chord I struck gave me an inward

shudder, for the instrument, an ancient Erard, was not in tune and its notes jangled hideously. But I set my teeth and after attempting a little Sibelius, with gruesome effect, sang a song, putting it into a key that showed up the fewest flat notes. It was the Dolmetch arrangement of *Have you Seen but a Bright Lillie Grow?* one of my most adored old songs, and even the jingly piano could not quite spoil it. Warm applause followed, and Mrs. Fortescue almost convulsed me by asking whether it was one of my own composing. She expressed disappointment at my reply, and I had to sing a couple of my own effusions, which were greeted with enthusiasm.

"It is your turn now, Edward," said his sister, to the Squire.

The Squire declared himself quite willing to sing if Miss Prescott wouldn't be too hard on him. I saw José frown at the suggestion, and when he chose his song from a somewhat dilapidated pile in the music cabinet, she frowned more, exclaiming: "You always choose the one nobody can play, Teddy. It's too bad of you. And you know you can't sing it, anyhow," she went on. "Why not *Drink, Puppy, Drink,* or *A-Hunting We Will Go?* They suit you much better."

"Because I don't want to," said the Squire, with the mutinous laugh of a naughty schoolboy. "It's too hot to go a-hunting and the puppies don't want a drink—do you, my dears?" appealing

to the spaniel and terrier who were much in evidence. "I want to sing *The Yeoman's Wedding*, and if I don't sing it like a professional, Miss Prescott will make allowances. I'm a bit out of practice, but will do my level best."

"But who's going to play it?" demanded José. "You *are* an aggravating old blighter, Father. Why can't you do as you're told?"

"That's how she bullies me!" He turned to me with eyes full of fun and asked if I could play it for him. Bracing my nerves to withstand what might be to come, I consented, and started boldly on the rhythmic, syncopated accompaniment upon which the Squire launched himself, a bar or two late, with immense gusto.

He has a stentorian voice, of small compass, and went at the song as a bull at a fence, coming to grief on the high notes but riding on gaily in good time and tune, considering the state of the piano. Probably he couldn't hear it! He never took breath till the last gasp, and then took it anywhere, getting faster and faster till, at the end, it seemed a race as to which would win, piano or voice. I grew breathless keeping up with him. Red in the face, and panting, he was so obviously delighted with himself that he volunteered another song and put *Will-o'-the-Wisp* before me. We had another exciting race, and I must say it was good fun; for his enjoyment was infectious. The piano jangled and groaned; the room echoed with monstrous

sound; glass globes rang like little bells as he roared the last note and I ran down the chromatic scale to its final rumbling in the bass.

Mr. Wakelyn wiped his face and declared that I was the best accompanist he had ever known. He hadn't enjoyed a song so much for years. Would I like to try the *Vicar of Bray?* He might get a little mixed over the words, but it had a good chorus and——

Here José intervened, gently but firmly.

"Darling old Ted," she said, rubbing her nose on his sleeve, "you really do sing like a cherub and we love to hear your dulcet tones, even when they crack on the high notes; but I'm sure Miss Prescott is tired. You *do* take it out of the accompanist, you know, dear. And besides, we want to play bridge."

We had a pleasant game. I played with the Squire, who was very indulgent to the weak spots in my game, and as I had fairly good cards we managed to put up a good fight against José and her aunt, who play well. It is so much easier when one has good cards. When mine are bad continuously I am apt to lose interest—and consequently points.

At eleven cakes and drinks were brought in and then Mr. Wakelyn and José walked home with me.

It was a glorious night; no moon, but the stars were radiant and the air as sweet as May air can be. The Squire talked of the crops and seemed to know

all about farming, while José hummed to herself and did not pretend to listen. Suddenly she said :

" This time next week I suppose ' Squills ' will be here. You'll have to come and sing to him, Miss Prescott. His nature wants softening."

" Don't be so irreverent, you little monkey," her father said, laughing. " She is speaking of my half-brother, her uncle, Miss Prescott; a man double her age, with fifteen times her brains."

" He regards me as a sort of cheese mite," observed José, " a kind of parasite, because I do nothing but exist beautifully."

The Squire coughed. " Did you say ' beautifully,' Jo, or did my ears deceive me? "

" I did, your worship, and I maintain it. I exist like the lily of the field and the butterfly, simply to fulfil my destiny, and you can't deny that I resemble them in that particular. But Uncle Dick has no use for butterflies and lilies. He thinks they cumber the earth."

" Oh, come, Joseph," the Squire protested. " That's a bit wide of the mark, isn't it? You'll prejudice Miss Prescott against Uncle Dick and make her think him a dry old stick."

" Well, isn't he? "

" Nothing of the kind, and you know it. He's one of the best. But because he won't play tennis all day long with you, and isn't mad on hunting, you call him names. Most people find him a very interesting man, and he's certainly a clever one."

"Oh, no doubt! Specially when he gets on to microbes and bacilli and all the nasty little things we have in our blood, everlastingly fighting each other. For my part, I'd rather not know they're there."

I agreed with her, shuddering.

"There's nothing Uncle Dick loves so much in the world as finding 'em out and getting what he calls 'cultures' of 'em," declared José; "and if that isn't a sign of deadly dryness in a man, I don't know what is."

Before my mind's eye rose a vision of Uncle Dick—a wizened, bald-headed medical practitioner in spectacles, with a grim face and quelling manner.

"My brother has spent a good deal of time on research work, Miss Prescott," said the Squire, "and he has been successful in discovering the cause of certain diseases, especially in the nervous system. He is quite a well-known pathologist, and holds an important appointment at St. Paul's Hospital."

A sudden light dawned on me. "Why, of course," I exclaimed, "he must be Dr. Richard Wakelyn, of whom I have heard my friend, Judith Wills, speak. Strange! I never connected his name with yours. He is a very distinguished man, I believe."

We had arrived at my garden gate.

"Who said he wasn't distinguished?" José said, with a grimace. "I merely observed that he soars above all mortal weaknesses and has no use for butterflies except to stick pins through them and

examine their parasites through a powerful microscope."

"Oh, don't!" I cried.

She laughed delightedly.

"Wait till you see him and he gets his pin through you. I can always feel it in my back when he looks at me. And yet he's rather a dear, in some things. When he comes here for a rest he spends most of his time trying to cure hopeless cases of illness in the village. But then, of course, he loves 'cases'—they're a form of amusement to him. I believe it is old Mrs. Bates that is bringing him down this time, really, though he says he needs a few days' rest. But he very likely won't come, after all. He may hear of a new microbe in Timbuctoo and fly off there to find it. However, I hope he'll come. It'll be fun to hear him and Miss Prescott trying to knock sparks out of each other."

"Perhaps he'll scorch me to silence."

"Probably: unless you can exercise your unholy charms on him. But I fear he's invulnerable to female charms. He has never married because he couldn't find a woman ugly and useful enough for him. That's true, Teddy; he as good as said so, the last time I chaffed him about being a bachelor."

"Tosh!" her father ejaculated, and drew her away as I unlocked the door and entered my home.

III

I had not realised, when I stayed till nearly midnight at the Hall, that I had to enter a haunted house at night, all lonely in its silence, with Sally asleep upstairs. So, when José and her father had left me, I felt a little shiver of the nerves as Pomander jumped down from a chair with a soft thud. Sally had left a nightlight burning in the hall, but its light only threw strange eerie shadows about the room, and I was glad to hurry upstairs, with my lighted candle, taking the cat with me. A cat is a great protection against everything supernatural, and so I allowed him the rare privilege of sleeping on my bed, a privilege he welcomed with his usual signs of ecstasy. For nearly half an hour he purred loudly and washed himself all over; then edged himself into the middle of the bed and slept. He is not a good bedfellow for this reason, and because, whenever he wakes, bliss so overcomes him, that he has to indulge in more rapturous singing and washing, kneading up the bed and rubbing himself against my nose at intervals during the night.

But he is so solid, so material, that it is impossible to believe in anything immaterial when his soft warm body is nigh.

I found myself, for a long while before going to sleep, pondering over what José had said about her uncle, and trying to remember what Judith Wills had told me about him; to connect the two accounts. And most of all my mind would dwell on the assertion

that he was impervious to feminine charms. I could not help wondering if José had not deliberately tried to engage my attention and curiosity by that statement. She is surely sharp-witted enough to know that nothing intrigues a woman so much as to know that a man despises her sex; nothing stimulates the desire of conquest so much as to be told that a certain man is invulnerable.

Of course I did not believe, for one moment, that any man existed who preferred the ugly but useful woman to the pretty but useless one. The fallacy of that has so oft been demonstrated that the reverse has become commonplace. For my own part, I have never yet met a thoroughly useless woman, of the type José called 'butterfly,' the type bent on beautifying and amusing herself, who has not appeared to cast a spell over almost every man she met. I say 'almost' to allow for exceptions; but those exceptions are surely rare enough. I thought of Judith Wills, handsome, clever, unselfish, spending her life for others, and unmarried at thirty-five. She has assured me that no man has, in so many words, asked her to marry him. I remembered her admiring comment on Dr. Richard Wakelyn and wondered. If he were looking out for the useful woman, why didn't he fall in love with Judith? She met him fairly often. Perhaps she was not ugly enough!

No. I smiled in dozing off to sleep; there was no doubt in my mind that 'Squills' would be far more likely to court the pretty butterfly; for men

are made that way, though they are not aware of it. They keep their ideal woman in her shrine and marry the other. I was reflecting on the kind of frivolity most likely to prove effective in Dr. Wakelyn's case when I fell asleep.

CHAPTER X

I

I MADE a fair copy of my song this morning and it pleased me very much, for it is the best I have written. The accompaniment is simple, and suggestive of lute or spinet, with none of the obvious striving for quaint effect that I was so conscious of in my first, laboured attempts. Was it just a little inspired by the rain-scented evening when I walked between the shining hedges and seemed to hear its lilt in the melody of birds?

I took it round to the Heathers, in my joy, and sang it to them. They were enchanted with it, but I dare not trust their admiration, knowing their judgment to be so biassed by the goodness of their hearts and the warmth of their affections. They are too apt to see things through a golden haze, and their natural good taste suffers from a lack of fastidious criticism. Or is it that they suppress criticism for the sake of their boundless charity? For I know they are intensely fastidious in certain matters. Anything vulgar, coarse or in ill taste offends their susceptibility. Felicity confided in me that she could not read certain authors—Kipling and Wells, for instance—because they were so often coarse in

language, and Wagner's music seems to her " rather too violent and unrestrained."

They love half-tones, the dear sisters, and even crude truth distresses them. I am sure that I shock them sometimes. And yet I know they will listen to all the horrible tales of the village women without turning a hair, such tales as, from the mouth of Mrs. Mee, will send me flying from her presence.

I have an idea that their approval of my song had influenced me in the writing of it, and that I was trying to please them rather than any possible public. If so, I may get it back from the publishers. I must write another soon, to be prepared for this emergency. For is not song-writing now my trade? If curds and cream will not sell, I must try a saveloy.

II

I have had a few more callers, the doctor's wife and some of the Heathers' and Wakelyns' friends in the locality. They were quite ordinary folk, the kind of women who are interested only in their neighbours, their houses, children, friends and servants, and all the material things of life. Art is represented to them as old furniture, of which they can, mostly, talk with enthusiasm, and in the large sphere of social affairs they are, of course, all on one side, their own side. To them servants and village folk are an inferior race, to be regarded, more or less, as a kind of useful but aggravating and grasping animal. Labour, as a vital force in politics

and economics, has not struck them. At present it is but a newspaper word, rather freely used and representing something inimical to peace and prosperity. But, after all, what can be talked of in the formal afternoon call, when strange woman meets strange woman and each is oppressed by a dreadful self-consciousness? No doubt they found my conversation fully as dull as I found theirs. And yet, could we have broken through the crust of politeness, we might have found common topics of interest. I imagined myself lifting curtains and taking peeps at the real selves behind, while they were talking the conventional stuff in which we all see fit to disguise our intimate tastes and opinions. In the lined faces of my visitors I read heart sorrows and tragedies that could, doubtless, if written in fiction or drama, command my deepest interest; and yet there they sat, simpering and talking banalities. "My dear Miss Prescott, I assure you the working classes have no conscience and the one idea of servants, to-day, is to go out and amuse themselves."

That is the kind of thing I heard many times, oracularly delivered. And to my question: "Isn't that very natural?" I received a stare of shocked surprise and no answer. One lady seemed quite affronted because I said that I should not care for a housemaid's work, and she preached a little homily about what we were born to, and the difference of stations into which Providence has been pleased to place us. If you are born a housemaid, she argued, you should like housemaid's work, and if you don't

like it you must be a blot on creation, a rebel against the Almighty. It was a very simple method of settling the question, and I made no attempt to controvert it. All would have ended well had she not concluded sweetly: "No doubt the housemaid would not care for *your* duties," when I had to reply quickly: "Oh, wouldn't she? I know she would." And at that speech the lady rose to go, with a smile frozen on her lips and scorn in her heart.

I smiled over 'my duties' when she had gone. It would probably have shocked her to know that I did everything I liked, at any time I liked; and my sole 'duties' were to order things, pay for them and write an occasional song for the dear, unmusical public to buy in its thousands. No doubt her own duties were onerous enough, with a large household to control and a large social circle to visit and entertain. After all, she had added to my joy in life. For I realised my good fortune, while I pitied the naughty little housemaid who hurried through her work and longed for her night out. And I reflected how I should hate to be a servant in that lady's house. Then, as I am apt to apply lessons to myself, I went into the kitchen.

"Sally," I said, "are you happy here and not too hard worked?"

She stared at me. "Lor', yes, Miss Val. Why, there's nothing to do here compared to what there was in the old 'ome."

"And is Mabel content? Does she ever grumble?"

"I should like to catch her at it. What's she got to grumble at? Light work and good food and all her evenings to herself."

"Are you ever dull in the evenings, Sally? Don't you want to go out more?"

Sally looked at me with earnest, troubled eyes.

"Whatever's the matter with you, this evening, Miss Val?" she asked. "Has somebody been telling you I was dissatisfied?"

"Certainly not. But Mrs. Trevellyan suggested that servants are always wanting to go out——"

"Oh, that woman!" with a snort of contempt. "Everybody round 'ere knows she's a nigger driver."

"You haven't answered my question, Sally."

"I've nothing to complain of, Miss Val. Never was one of them sort as always want to be traipsing out and about. And I'm pretty tired of evenings. Besides, you said I might go out when I liked. Don't you worry your 'ead about me, Miss. So long as you're *H*appy, I am."

When Sally wants to emphasise a word she gives it a specially breathed aspirate. I left her and felt at peace with the world.

III

I await, with impatience, the publishers' verdict on my song. It is so different from my others. What if they refuse it? This possibility became so insistent in my mind, that I hunted out another lyric this morning and started another song on the

old sentimental lines, with a honeyed tune, an easy, stereotyped accompaniment and a nice easy high F at the end that any ordinary soprano under forty could take without cracking too badly. The only important point was to get a good vowel sound on it without introducing a superfluous oh, or ah, which is a too obvious device. I wrote the words when I was eighteen, so they ought to be silly enough to please most people. The title would entrance, I felt sure: *Love is Life*. Could anything capture the schoolgirl more effectually? And the refrain to each verse repeated it with a beautiful inversion, "Love is Life, and Life is Love." This sort of thing:

Heather bells upon the hill
All the air with honey fill,
Fluting birds and humming bee
Make of love their melody,
Sing their loudest all day long,
Life is one sweet tender song.
Pan the piper leads the choir,
Sets the tune of heart's desire.
Sing the song the piper plays
Through the long bright summer days,
Sing with mavis, merle and dove,
Love is Life, and Life is Love!

and so forth. It is very easy to set these short lines, with plenty of breathing pauses for the amateur singer. Not like the spinet song, with such phrases as "The ghosts of half-forgotten things will touch the keys with fingers numb." I could not help laughing over the song when it was finished; it is so

exactly like a hundred others of its kind, a fact cheering me in the belief that I had written something useful, if not beautiful. Like the worm in the thrush's ' little inside,' it is necessary to the production of further song; since it will keep my fires burning and a roof over my head.

When I had written it down roughly I went to take tea with Mrs. Walton, whose pressing invitation I had accepted a few days before. I would have preferred to stay at home with a book, for I am absorbed in *Villette* (for the third or fourth time—and what a masterpiece it is !), but my mood was happy, as it always is after writing a song, and I set out in good spirits. The farm is a mile away, so I was hot and tired before reaching it, but the loveliness of the country made it an enchanted walk. The hedges were snowy with hawthorn and all the little spinneys lay in a mist of blue, the soft grey blue of wild hyacinth. There are many of these delicious spots by the wayside in a hunting county, covers for foxes, and the dainty larches rising from the brushwood are now a lucent emerald filigree in which the last year's cones are set, like black pearls. Nightingales were singing in them, with thrushes and blackbirds. It is a town error, I find, to believe that the nightingale is a bird of night merely. He woos by daylight too.

The old farmhouse of dull red brick was wreathed in the lavender mist of wistaria, a lovely sight, and through the window of the cool bedroom into which Mrs. Walton insisted upon escorting me, the honeyed

fragrance was richly wafted. Indeed I could smell it as I walked up the uneven staircase, so passionately strong and sweet it was. My hostess was sure that I should like to take off my hat and coat, and wash my hands and face, after the long, dusty walk, and thus I went down to the big dining-room cooled and refreshed.

The family was gathered there. I was introduced to Mr. Robert Walton, a slight man with a thin, refined face, very unlike the ideal farmer; to Linda, the eldest girl, tall, graceful and pretty, with dark hair and blue eyes; to Charlie and Jimmy and Tommy, Maud and Doris; all in stages of shy and awkward youth; all with frank, good-looking, freckled faces, alive with interest in me and responsive to a smile.

A Gargantuan repast was spread before me on the long table; ham and eggs and potted meat, lettuces and watercress, jam and honey and countless different cakes. To one who hardly makes a meal of tea it was a little appalling, and I had to do violence to my digestive capacity by eating a great deal more than I wanted. But Mrs. Walton seemed quite dismayed when I declared my limit.

After tea I was shown the garden and invited to play tennis or croquet. Obviously I was expected to spend the entire evening with them and, in my mind's eye, another sumptuous meal loomed ominously, which I resolved to resist. The girl, Linda, interested me, but I had scarcely a word with her. There was a wistful look in her blue eyes, as if

she did not quite fit into her surroundings. I noticed how much her mother, and indeed the whole family seemed to depend upon her. She had no sooner gone into the garden with me than her father called her back to do something for him, and when she came out again her mother sent her on another errand. The children all demanded something of her. "Lind, where are my tennis shoes? I can't find them." "Lind, did you make that butterfly net you promised?" "Lind, I've got a hole in my pocket; you might mend it before it gets any worse" —and so forth. They all appeared to take it for granted that she was there for one purpose only—to minister to their wants.

I declined to play tennis; their court was not attractive, and had not been mown for a week, I am sure; but I played a couple of games of golf croquet with Charlie (the best player) against Mrs. Walton and Linda, winning both. And then I was taken indoors for the inevitable 'little music,' which I knew had been imminent from the first, and was dreading. It is always such *very* 'little' music that one hears in the ordinary drawing-room.

"I am longing to hear you play and sing, Miss Prescott," Linda said, in a low voice, with earnest eyes fixed on my face, as I seated myself at the piano. "I have all your songs and I simply love them, especially *The Footsteps of the Rain*."

I deprecated her taste while enjoying her flattery. And certainly the song she liked was my best, so far. "You'll sing it to me, won't you?" I suggested.

"Oh no, no!" she almost gasped. "I should never dare to sing your own songs before you. You know how they should be sung and I might spoil them."

There was discernment in that, and I felt I should like Linda. It is so true that another person's interpretation of a song, or piece of music, one has studied is generally unsatisfying. I never care to hear others play the pieces I play or sing the songs I sing, unless they are artists from whom I can learn something.

"I am sure you needn't be afraid, Linda; you sing them very nicely," declared her mother. "But of course we would rather hear them sung by you, Miss Prescott."

I declined to do this, however, and sang instead two songs of Lidgey's: *Earl Bristol's Lament* and *See where My Love a-Maying Goes*, which were, as provincial reporters say, "well received," and then Mrs. Walton commanded Linda to sing to me.

The girl complied, rose-red with nervousness, and I offered to accompany her. She set before me a song in vogue at the moment, the usual sickly confection of love and roses, with a feeble accompaniment, and I expected singing to match.

But at the first note I knew myself mistaken. What a voice! I was really startled by the glorious dramatic soprano that flooded the room, and drowned the toneless piano—full of rich undertones, and richer promise. Worse than untrained it was, of course, for the two guineas' worth of teaching at her boarding-

school had taught Linda nothing but to take her breath in the wrong places, to dwell on high notes, tightly produced, to mispronounce most of her words and put the accent always out of its right place. Left to herself, I could conceive that the girl's natural taste would have made her sing the poor foolish song simply and well; but her teacher had aimed at producing certain effects—and had succeeded!

At the end of the song I stood up and put both hands on her shoulders.

"My dear girl, you have a wonderful voice!" I exclaimed. "There's a fortune in it. You must have it properly trained."

To my embarrassment she threw her arms round my neck and fairly hugged me.

"Oh, you angel! you angel to say that!" she cried. "Tell them that—tell Father and the boys. They won't let me do anything with it. They won't let me go away and study. And I want to—I long to—oh, I do long so! I don't want to do anything but sing. I love singing—I love music, and I don't know anything about it. I am horribly ignorant. I——"

She faltered and broke down, walking to the window to hide her tears. There was a minute of dead silence and I felt extremely uncomfortable.

"You mustn't be foolish, Linda," her mother said awkwardly, for once at a loss for words. There was a tremor in her clear voice that softened the reprimand. "You know your father and I would do

anything in the world for your good, and it is not true to say you are ignorant. If you are, it is your own fault, for I'm sure enough has been spent on your education. We kept you at school another year, though I wanted you badly at home, because you wished to go on with music and languages, and——"

"What good was that?" the girl demanded in a muffled voice. "There was no one at the school who could teach me singing properly, and I had only three months' lessons anyhow."

"You're a very ungrateful girl!" exclaimed her mother sharply; and at that Linda fled from the room.

IV

"Pray forgive me," I said contritely, when she had gone. "I am so sorry I said anything to upset her. But really, you know, her voice is exceptional, and she ought to have a great success with it, if it were trained."

"Do you mean as a professional singer?" Mrs. Walton demanded, with shocked eyes.

"Certainly. She ought to be in opera. But of course that requires a long and expensive training. The concert platform would perhaps——"

"It is no good talking like that, Miss Prescott," she interrupted firmly, "for I am sure neither her father nor myself would dream of allowing any child of ours to go on the stage. That is one thing. For

another, I can't spare Linda. She is my right hand here."

I was silent. Perhaps she read my thoughts, for she went on : " You think I am selfish, I dare say ; but perhaps if you were in my place, you would feel as I do."

" No doubt I should, but——" I wanted to say that a hundred girls could be found to do what Linda did in that household, while not one in a thousand had such a voice, such a gift. But it was not my business and I prided myself on being no busybody. Why should I interfere ? I had no interest in Linda, met that day for the first time. And yet I realised, with surprise at myself, that I had a vehement personal desire for that superb voice to be trained.

" Of course I can only look at the matter from another angle—the art side," I concluded lamely.

" There are things more important than art," pronounced Mrs. Walton, with an air of finality. To which remark I offered no reply. Her point of view I could not understand ; it was impossible that she should understand mine. I was not so sure that I understood it myself, since what could it matter to me whether Linda enchanted the world with her voice or spent her life in domestic work ? I could only say that I must go home, apologising again for my rash words.

But that did not satisfy the good lady at all. She begged me to stay to supper and declared that Linda would never forgive her if she let me go ' like that.'

Then, suddenly, while I was protesting that I could not stay, her voice changed, and she asked, in a low tone: "Do you really think her voice is so good, Miss Prescott? There are plenty of others as good, aren't there?"

I assured her that I had never heard such a voice from any amateur, and urged that, if left untrained, in time it would become strained and lose its beauty. "If only to preserve it," I said, "she should have proper lessons. It will be ruined if she goes on singing as she is singing now."

She looked at me earnestly and there was something tragic in her eyes that moved me pitifully. I seemed to see the conflict between her own desires, her everyday need of Linda, and the mother's natural pride in her child's gift. It was just that glimpse of the soul so seldom vouchsafed in the ordinary intercourse of social life. In an impulse of sympathy, I exclaimed: "Oh, I do understand that it's a problem for you—a difficult problem. But you will do what is best for her in the end, I know. And, in the meantime, will you let me give her some lessons—just to keep her from going wrong and spoiling her beautiful voice? I had three years' good training in voice production before my father died—the one thing I learnt thoroughly—so I can teach her how to preserve her voice, if nothing else."

The offer made, I regretted it instantly. Here was I doing the very thing I had made up my mind not to do: interfering in another person's affairs.

Why should I waste my precious time and energy on teaching this girl, a stranger in whom I had not the slightest interest? It was idiotic, a foolish impulse, a step towards the abhorred ' parish work ' ! I should soon find myself drawn into every net the village spread for me. It might be the Sunday School next—oh, dear !

But I had done it, made the offer, which was at once pounced upon and accepted, with a warmth that cast, at least, a glow of conscious virtue over my weak surrender.

" How good of you ! How kind you are—how exceedingly kind ! " I fancied her eyes were humid, and certainly there was a new tone in the voice I had thought metallic : a tone suggesting what might have been the source of her daughter's vocal quality. " It will be such a boon and make the child so happy. She has been restless and discontented lately, but I am sure if she can go to you for lessons and feel she is learning how to sing properly, it will reconcile her to staying at home. There is no one hereabouts who could teach her. There used to be a London man come to Meadborough once a week, but his pupils fell off and now he doesn't come. She wants to go to London for lessons, but it's so far, and so expensive. I am more grateful to you than I can say, Miss Prescott "—she seized my hand and wrung it—" and if you will let us know your terms, or——" She blushed. " We should not like Linda to waste your time unless——"

I washed out all talk of ' terms,' in a few words :

it would be a pleasure to train such a lovely voice, and so forth. Mrs. Walton thanked me profusely again, but declared she could only accept my kind offer if I would allow her to supply me with eggs and butter. We had a little altercation over this and then she darted out of the room to call Linda.

Her gratitude was even more overpowering than her mother's. I made her sing a couple more songs and gave her some breathing exercises. Then she walked home with me, after fruitless beseechings that I would stay to supper. All the way she poured out a flood of rapture and aspirations, so childish and natural that they did not sound egoistic, and I found myself growing more and more interested in her. She was eighteen last birthday, nearly a year ago; she had always loved music and poetry—and didn't I think music was just poetry in notes? Novels, of course, she revelled in and I found her taste not bad. She couldn't read Jane Austen (I wonder if I did at her age !), but she loved *Jane Eyre* and *The Mill on the Floss* and *Woodstock*. Her dreamy, romantic sentiment was akin to my own at her age, but I think she has something more in her than I had. Is it genius and a sense of high destiny? The love passion does not seem to dominate her thoughts, as it did mine at eighteen. She longs for a career—'to *do* something and *be* something,' she phrased it, as if she felt that her romance depended on herself alone and not upon any possible lover. Apart from her voice she intrigued me psychologically.

Speaking of our different fancies, the new moon having risen, I told her of my childish fancy about the moon pearls, and she was entranced with the idea.

"Even though you can't find one, it's lovely to be looking for it all your life, isn't it?" she said, and I saw that the symbol had its significance for her. "Some people never look for anything underneath. They only see the things on top and go fussing along, eating and drinking and cleaning—and all that."

We laughed together at my gate. I did not ask her to come in, for I wanted to be alone with myself after so many hours of other people. She wrung my hand and turned to go. Then, wheeling round with a swift gesture, said shyly: "I think I've found my moon pearl—*you*"; and literally ran away. The bright flush that lit up her blue eyes remained in my memory long after the flutter of her skirt above the slim ankles had faded from sight.

V

The Heathers were delighted when I told them what I had done, adding: "I am afraid I have only sown dissension in a happy family."

"Oh no," Felicity declared. "There was a little rift growing between Linda and her mother, which your kindness will do much to mend. And you don't know how kind it is, how happy it will make Linda."

"Perhaps, for a time. But you cannot suppose that my teaching will put a stop to her ambition. As her voice develops that ambition will increase. This is only the beginning of a struggle, I'm afraid."

"If you do what is kind you can safely leave the result in God's hands," said the dear woman softly: "and if He has bestowed a wonderful gift upon Linda, I am sure her father and mother will realise, eventually, that it must not be hidden away. Don't let that trouble you, Valentine. You have followed a noble impulse of your kind heart and it ought to make you happy."

"Oh, but I don't want my kind heart to betray me into such impulses," I exclaimed, with a shrug. "Dear Felicity, don't expect it from me. Don't augur from this—which was only prompted by an artistic interest in an exceptional voice—that I'm going to teach the village boys and girls to sing, as Prudence teaches them to draw and you teach them a dozen other things. It was no altruistic motive that made me offer to give Linda lessons. It was just selfishness. I could listen to her voice all day, but if she goes on singing as she does now, it will be practically done for in ten years. Her head notes, or what should be head notes, will be screams. It would be a shame not to save such a voice, though I'm sorry I offered to. It was officious and I can't think why I did not mind my own business."

"I know why." Felicity smiled: "Do you remember those words of Sir John Davies:

> We that acquaint ourselves with every zone,
> And pass both tropics, and behold both poles,
> When we come home are to ourselves unknown
> And unacquainted still with our own souls?

You don't know yourself, dear Valentine, or how naturally kind you are. And you are not a bit officious."

What is one to say to such a woman? I shall disappoint her horribly some day.

CHAPTER XI

I

A GOOD many of my precious spring hours had been wasted and I resolved to spend some days in the garden before returning any of my calls. I find it necessary to keep a constant eye on Jolly, who shows a distinct partiality for the kitchen garden and an unconcealed contempt for some of my favourite flowers. Certain of them, the marigold, valerian, honesty, poppy and nasturtium, are no better than weeds in his eyes, and the flower he honours next to Queen Rose is my Lord Geranium. To my horror I found him one morning tearing up a miniature forest of red valerian, just showing its first bloom and promising a fine glow of colour opposite the verandah.

"Ye gods! Jolly, what *are* you doing?" I cried in dismay. He had already rooted up half a barrow-load of the dear things, a limp mass of the prettiest pale green in the garden.

"I'm a-rootling out them weeds," he said.

"But I love them. They're not weeds; they're valerian."

He fixed upon me a gaze in which amazement struggled with incredulity.

"Well!" he ejaculated, and words fail to describe

the emphasis he put into that ambiguous exclamation.

"Can you put them back? Will they live?"

"I've never been asked to plant weeds afore," he said stiffly.

"But I like them!"

He heaved a deep sigh.

"There aren't no accountin' for tastes," he muttered, "but if you let such things as them grow all over the place, you'll get nothing fit to be seen in time. They want rootling out."

"I'm sorry you don't like them, Jolly, but I do. I love the colours, that pale green and dark red, against the yew hedge. You must humour me in this. It may be my bad taste, but I can't help it."

He remained darkly silent, as he began to put the plants back in the soil, 'heeling them in,' as he calls it, viciously.

"Am I to leave them dandeloyans in too?" he asked sardonically.

I pretended to hesitate.

"They're very pretty, certainly, but perhaps they had better come up. Don't touch that clump of marigolds in the corner, though, I like them."

He muttered something. It sounded like "you would." And I thereupon regaled him with a tit-bit from Culpeper on that valuable plant.

"You may not be aware, Jolly," I said, "that the marigold is an herb of the sun and that it will cure smallpox and measles (or as Culpeper spells it 'meazels'). The flowers made into a posset will

expel all sorts of malignant pestilences and—let me see—will succour and comfort the heart exceedingly in fevers, pestilential or not pestilential."

To my surprise he looked up and said :

" I never 'eard of 'em curing pestilences, but everybody knows they're good for bruises and such like. A poultice of marigold flowers'll take the pain out sooner nor anything. But they aren't fit for a garden—ony a vegetable garden. They didn't oughter grow among proper flowers."

Another day he came up to me with an exaggerated air of deference and asked if I would like him to leave the ground elder that was choking up the lily bed because it had got ' raythe a pretty flower.'

But I survived his withering sarcasm and grew rather fond of my crusty gardener. He worked well and succeeded in getting the kitchen garden in good order sooner than I expected, for it was overgrown with weeds. It was too late for peas and potatoes, but he put in seed for winter greens, some vegetable marrows, lettuces and a few other things, which grew very well. But I had to check his ardour for what he called ' muck,' or the odour of manure would have overpowered all my fragrant essences. I believe, if I had not struck against it, he would have laid the entire garden under a foot-thick coat of unsavoury fertilisers, late as it was. I promised him a freer hand in the late autumn, convinced by his earnest arguments that the garden had been exhausted by previous over-production and the forest of strong, sucking weeds.

He was excruciatingly tidy. He tied all the madonna lilies and delphiniums to stakes so tightly that I had to go round surreptitiously to loosen them when he had gone, for they were perfect eyesores. Every carnation bloom had its very obvious and aggressive stick; while I found, to my disgust, that he had cut every wand of the yellow jessamine almost right to the wall it had beautified so luxuriantly the day I called to view the house. When I requested that he would not do this again, he scowled and said in an injured voice : " All right, miss, as *you* please, of course," but I had a shrewd suspicion that he did not intend to obey my order.

Sally seemed to like him, in spite of his churlishness. I often came upon the pair of them talking at the scullery door when he went for his mug of tea and slice of bread and cheese in the middle of the morning, a repast that she had gently hinted might be acceptable to the " pore feller who had no woman at home to look after him." Sometimes I found them together in the kitchen garden, whither she would eagerly explain that she had gone for a bit of mint, or parsley, or horse-radish. The kitchen garden lay at the south-west of the house, and there was a door into it from the kitchen. It was otherwise reached by a shady path on the other side of the stable, so that it was fairly secluded. My back garden was nearly all lawn and flowering trees, with beds of violets, forget-me-nots, primroses, woodruff, anemones and wild hyacinths at their base. The latter is, I think, almost the only flower

that seems able to bloom without any sun at all. Under one low-growing tree, the Cockspur Thorn, the lovely bluebells had flowered profusely—a patch of lavender blue among the branches sweeping the ground, which I did not discover till they were nearly over. Primroses come before the tree foliage keeps the sun from them, but it is dense by the time the hyacinths appear. By the way, I wonder why we never call them jacinths now? It is a prettier word, I think.

The days flew by, far too short for all I wanted to do. May ripened into June, with her spicy scents of clove pink and mock orange, honeysuckle, rose and sweet pea. All the lovely blue things of the garden blossomed, anchusa and delphinium, larkspur and cornflower; while above them the rosy hawthorn and laburnum made lovely splashes of colour against the foliage of dark trees beyond. Then, with the long days and languorous evenings, when the bridal music of birds is chastened and the air sweet with all the aromatic perfumes of clove and orange and honey, come strange stirrings and yearnings of the heart that produce an almost unendurable melancholy. 'The scent and the glow and the passion of June' get into one's blood, and to be alone seems a crime against youth and love. I wrote a silly sentimental lyric one day, beginning:

> Youth and love go hand in hand
> Through the summer's flowery land,
> Youth with silver lilies crowned,
> Love's white brow with roses bound——

and meant to set it to music, but I was too lazy. It was a time to dream, if not to live, and my dreams were all of love and Amyas. With him I wandered through the woods, now heavy with leafage; with him I sat under the trees in my tiny orchard and read *The House of Life* and *Laus Veneris* and any other frankly erotic poetry that came to hand. For I have long been aware of an erotic strain in my blood, mixed up with the love of beauty and romance. It is only when a real man comes nigh that it seems to wither and shudder away. For a man, every man I have met, always seems such an outsider to one's dreams! Ideally and theoretically he is glorious and indispensable, but his actual presence is, I find, usually an antidote to sentiment, an ox breaking into a fairy ring. Perhaps I am too much alone.

José comes often to see me, but we do not find much in common. Her dreams are all of tennis at present, and she lures me on to play singles with her till I am exhausted, and retire badly beaten and depressed.

There are some youths who come to play with her too, pleasant boys who call her Jo and obviously regard her as another boy. They all seem different creatures from the lovers one dreams of, and I sometimes find myself picturing a love scene between one of them and José. It would assuredly be very humorous!

I sounded her on the subject one day.

"I suppose one can't have love without a lover,

but don't men always seem to take everything that is beautiful and romantic out of life? " I suggested.

She stared at me and asked me what I meant.

" They are so matter-of-fact; they don't idealise. They bring muddy boots on to one's dainty carpets."

She was as mystified as ever. I went on : " Those boys who play tennis with you, for instance, are like Newfoundland pups. One can't imagine them making love, reading poetry under the shade of trees, or writing it to a mistress's eyebrow."

She burst into a hearty laugh. " Good lord, no ! I should hope not. All that sort of rot has gone out of fashion long ago."

" Yet I suppose they—and you—will marry some day."

" I expect so—with any luck."

" What do you call luck? "

" Well," she grinned with her frank boyish eyes, " when the right one comes along, you know. It's then you begin to feel silly and act the goat. Not that I can ever imagine myself having poetry read to me in the shade. Can you? "

" I should hope so ! "

" I mean *me*, not you."

" Oh no. You'd go to sleep."

" I shouldn't. I should jolly well pull his hair and tell him not to be an ass."

" And if he doesn't read poetry to me—I mean figuratively speaking—I shall tell him he is no better than an ass and I will play no Titania to his Bottom."

José chuckled. " You won't," she said; " that

is only highbrow talk. I am open to make a bet that he won't have an ounce of poetry in his whole composition and will laugh at you. And the more he laughs, the more you'll adore him. For that's the way of things in this topsy-turvy world. It will probably be my luck to get a poet. But I hope not."

She was very surprised when I told her about Linda's lessons, and rather contemptuous.

"What's the good of putting ideas into the girl's head?" she exclaimed. "She fancies herself quite enough now, because she's asked to sing at concerts. Common little thing! She'll marry one of her own class and drop it all in a few years."

This made me rather angry. I told José that I did not consider Linda common at all; that her voice was magnificent, and that, properly trained, there would be a fortune in it. José was visibly impressed by this, but she doesn't know Linda, or want to know her. And, apart from their social traditions, I cannot conceive they would ever be friends.

Linda makes a much stronger appeal to me, however, than José does, and I think her more naturally refined. Her voice enchants me more every time I hear it. The passion in it is wonderful and expresses all I feel in my most exotic moments. Even the silliest love song seems the real thing when she pours it out, 'with full-throated ease,' making every note, every word, vibrate in one's heart. What a celestial gift it is! If the angels

sing like that one need not fear being bored in heaven.

II

My publishers have accepted the spinet song, but say that they do not anticipate a great sale for it, and that it is not so good as my other songs. It is, of course, a hundred times better, but not from their point of view—the selling point. I must finish *Love is Life*. That will please them and bring grist to the mill.

I do nothing but write love lyrics now, for oh! *I am love-sick!* The heat has been voluptuous these last days, and the scent of the madonna lilies in the Hermes Court, with the woodbine climbing over the verandah, seems to intoxicate my senses. Roses break bloom, and rain their lovely rainbow petals about the lawns at twilight; the little brown owl cries plaintively at night. The trembling voice of the wood dove I used to hear in the pink thorns at sunrise is silent, but thrush and blackbird still sing all day, with the fluty willow wren and tree warbler. I wander about aimlessly, thinking of Amyas and imagining what our meeting would be like, were he flesh and blood like myself. Sometimes I whisper to the fragrant rose bushes—"Come to me, Amyas, come. I want you—I ache for you." And he answers, "Sweetheart, I am always near you." But it is no good. *I want his touch.*

I suppose one is affected by nature's passionate, midsummer mood. Last night I wandered into the

orchard and was lost in its mysterious enchantment. The scented air was full of little white moths, which seemed the drifting souls of fairy lovers, and the moon:

> . . . like a flower
> In heaven's high bower
> In silent delight
> Smiled down on the night.

Beneath her smile the barley field beyond the orchard shone as a silver sea. Just the night to find a moon pearl! In fanciful mood I stopped to look for it at the root of a fragrant clump of meadowsweet and found—a large toad!

Now I can never see a toad without thinking of Rossetti's lines in *Jenny:*

> Like a toad within a stone
> Seated while Time ambles on—
> Sits there since the earth was cursed—

How does it go?—

> Sits there deaf and blind and alone.
> Aye, and shall not be drive out
> Till that which shuts him round about
> Break at the very Master's stroke,
> And the dust thereof vanish as smoke;
> And the seed of man vanish as dust:—
> Even so within the world is lust.

I shuddered. This morning I heard a horrible village story of a girl in desperate trouble. How I hate to be told of these miserable wrongs and lapses—to be reminded of Nature's abominable cruelty to woman! I try to forget it, and could never, as Felicity and Prudence do, go to see the unhappy creature and condole with her parents. Or, like Judy Wills,

interest myself in a Rescue Home. It would make me hate God and Nature and the whole world, I am sure. And now the horrid toad evoked the image of "lazy, laughing, languid Jenny," and the village girl, and all the things my very soul abhors, spoiling the serene beauty of the night. I called Sir Charles, who was chasing the little fairy moths over the grass, and went indoors. It was necessary to break that chain of thought, so I opened my piano and plunged into the Scherzo from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which suggests so many exquisite things and requires such quick and careful attention. After it I played the dreamy Intermezzo and was just nearing the end when I heard steps outside and low voices. Theseus and Hypolita, of course, with their train of courtiers, or Oberon and Titania. Who else would come at such an invocation?

With a loudly beating heart, which an interruption in music always causes, I went to the open window and looked out.

III

Two people stood in the moonlight—José Wakelyn and a man.

I gave a sudden gasp and felt faint. Could it be Amyas?

"Why did you stop?" said José. "We were listening ever so quietly, and we heard all the first piece. It sounds so topping out here."

"This is my Uncle Dick, generally known as 'Squills,'" she went on as I opened the front door

to them. "He wanted a walk after dinner, so we strolled round here. Teddy and Tanty were too sleepy to move, but Uncle Dick is like the Lord of Israel and 'slumbers not nor sleeps.'"

"I'm afraid my niece indulges in hyperbole," said her uncle. "Her tongue is a more than usually unruly member, as you have probably discovered."

"May we smoke here, or shall we sit outside?" was José's sole reply to this accusation. "It's fearfully hot indoors."

I agreed and we went round to the verandah to sit looking down upon my little figure of Hermes backed by madonna lilies, shining under the full moon like pearly lamps. I sat in the shadow, while the moonlight fell on the faces of my guests, and was thus able to see what 'Uncle Dick' was like.

I saw a man of good height but not very tall, spare, well knit and strong-looking, with deeply set eyes whose colour, of course, I could not tell. His lips were rather thin and there were humorous lines at their corners. He was clean-shaven and had fair closely cropped hair. There was a faint resemblance to the Squire, but Dr. Wakelyn's face was not so broad and he had a better nose, a more cleanly defined chin. He was pale where the Squire was ruddy, and that, more than anything else, spoilt the likeness. I decided that the doctor was in no way remarkable to look upon, and certainly not handsome. His voice was the most distinctive thing about him; though quiet, it had a ring of decision in it.

We talked about the obvious things, the weather, the hay, the moonlight. He smoked a pipe and José cigarettes. I inhaled the breath of my lilies and was content.

"You like the country," said Dr. Wakelyn suddenly. I became aware that he had been studying me.

"I love it."

"With emphasis."

"Unreservedly. I adore this place. I love the woods and fields, the birds and beasts, the trees and flowers. I love my old house and garden, even my precious ghost."

"Have you heard him yet?"

"Oh yes, indeed, twice. Once very clearly."

"Don't! I shan't dare to go to bed," ejaculated José.

"Why, my dear Joe, the Hall is simply crowded with ghosts," he said. "If they had had bodies they'd jostle you. And you pretend to be afraid of a poor lovesick shepherd—fie!"

"You've never seen a ghost at the Hall," she retorted.

"Haven't I? That's all you know about it."

"You don't believe in them, Squills; you know you don't. You're an awful fraud, leading Valentine to think you're a spiritualist."

She had taken to calling me Valentine lately.

"He hasn't led me on," I protested. "On the contrary, I am persuaded that your uncle is a most profound sceptic."

He looked at me quizzically for a few seconds.

"Are you really convinced of that?" he said. "You're wrong, Miss Prescott; I am a scientist, but not a sceptic."

"I thought the one implied the other."

"No. Scepticism dries up imagination at its fount, and where would science be without imagination? All its great discoveries have been made by men of imaginative conception. They reach out for something more than lies about them. It is only the dull fool who refuses to believe anything that doesn't happen to square with what he has been taught."

"But you don't believe in ghosts, Nunky," José persisted. "What's the good of hedging about it?"

"I don't believe," he replied; "nor do I disbelieve. How can I flatly deny the possibility of anything I've never tested? I have not gone in for psychical research, nor have I ever seen any manifestations of etheric matter—as I believe they call it. But certain of my studies and experiments in cerebral pathology, and in the phenomena of hypnotism and suggestion, have convinced me that we have a good deal yet to learn in those directions."

"Oh now, if you're going to hurl long words at me, Dicky, I'm off," said José, knocking the ashes off her cigarette and getting up from her seat. "It's all very well for you two intellectuals, but I want a dictionary."

"Fortunately everyone is not quite so ignorant as Miss Josephine Wakelyn," said her uncle suavely.

"Beast! I am going home at once. I was going to ask Val to sing to you, but now I shan't."

"Will you sing to me, Miss Prescott?" he asked, turning to me with such a frank, boyish smile that I suddenly discovered he was handsome, after all.

"I defy her!" exclaimed José.

"You see, I am terrorised. Another time," I said to him, and he laughed. It was late, for we had been talking some time. At the gate José suddenly broke out: "Oh, I nearly forgot my message—the Squire's respectful compliments to Miss Prescott, and he hopes she will do him the honour of bestowing the pleasure of her company upon him on Thursday night to dinner. He is yearning to sing *The Yeoman's Wedding* again. I'm asking the Heathers too and the Rector, with his D.B. Uncle Dick pines to hear more about 'my cousin the Dean' and the British aristocracy in general."

At this moment Pomander came up and rubbed against the doctor's legs.

"What a handsome fellow!" he said.

"He is all the children of my house. I am glad you don't dislike cats."

"He likes 'em to cut up," interpolated José. Her uncle took no notice of that remark but fixed me with a penetrating look of his steadfast eyes.

"Why are you glad?" he asked.

I tried to reply, but floundered. "Oh, because——"

"Because she's a little cat herself," the girl flung

in, puckishly. "That's it, isn't it, Val? A soft, dainty, purring, pretty pussy cat, with caressing ways. I warn you to beware of her, Nunky. She has two eyes so soft and brown. Take care! She gives a side glance and looks down—Beware! I learnt that in a duet at school."

"I'm afraid they didn't teach you much else," was his grim retort, as he shook hands with me. They went off wrangling, and I watched them down the moonlit road till her high voice and his ground bass died in the distance.

CHAPTER XII

I

I COULD not sleep that night. My room had been hot in the sun all day and the balmy air of the June night was not cool enough to refresh it. Moonlight threw strange shadows through the pink-flowered voile curtains; the dark patch of my looking-glass on the floor made me think of *Phantastes* and the carpet that turned into a rivulet under a faery spell. I could imagine my square of carpet—rambling pink sprays on a purple ground—a flower garden, and the shadow from my glass a pool of deep water.

I seemed to be waiting for something to happen, to be listening intently for I knew not what. When the church clock struck the hour of midnight I adopted one of my devices for courting sleep by saying over to myself some of the lovely things the poets have written about it—Henry the Fourth's invocation, and those lines from *The Ancient Mariner:*

> All glory be to Mary given,
> She sent the blessed sleep from Heaven
> That slid into my soul.

But these, and many others failed, in their potency, and I lay wide awake, full of strange phantasies

and half-expecting to see four angels round my bed 'two at my feet, two at my head,' until, about one o'clock, I heard the ghostly shepherd piping again.

There was no doubt in my mind, as I held my breath to listen. It was faint at first, but seemed to come nearer, till it was under my open window—a sweet thin sound, like the song of a robin on a winter's day. After the first tremor and quick heartbeats, I felt no fear, and found myself supplying the words as the pipe wailed its minor air:

Alas! poor shepherd!
Alack and well-a-day!
Before I fell in love, O,
Every month was May.

It was so near that curiosity conquered nervousness and I sprang out of bed to see if the shepherd would materialise before me. Should I see a misty figure standing below in the moonlight? But no; there was nothing visible, save the hawthorn trees and lavender hedge presided over by my juniper Adam and Eve, whose long black shadows were cast by the sinking moon along the flagged path and border. I became aware suddenly that the sound in my ears had ceased and a deadly stillness held its place. When had it left off? I could not tell. It was clear enough when I sprang out of bed and gone when I stood by the window.

With a shiver running up my spine into my hair, I turned back to bed. My own wraith, seen dimly in the long glass of a wardrobe, gave me another tremor

as I passed it, so unreal, so spectral, did it appear in the faint light. I thought of *Wuthering Heights* and poor mad Catherine's terror of her face in the glass. Is not one's reflection rather a ghostly thing, after all? We see ourselves and yet not ourselves, not the selves that others see, in those creatures that pose and grimace to us.

It gave me a thrill of mingled dread and pleasure to believe that the old house was really haunted, that something materially unaccountable was around and about it. The dread lay in the thought of the coming winter. It was all very well to listen for the shepherd's tender piping on midsummer nights, short, warm and fragrant; but I thought of the long nights of winter, when the winds would howl and whistle and whisper; when the old woodwork would creak and there would be no matin song of happy birds to break the eerie silence and chase away fears at two or three in the morning. The glamour I had felt about a haunted house when I took Shepherd's Delight had worn thin already, and something like fear was taking its place. Not rational fear; I knew there was nothing to harm me in the shepherd's tender piping; but that cold and grisly horror of the unknown which preys on human hearts and lends its worst terror to death.

The soft swish of the window curtain in a breeze heralding the dawn gave me 'creeps' even now, and I endeavoured to change the current of my thoughts by thinking of Amyas. But he would not come; his image had curiously receded to a distance

and in its place rose another face and figure: I saw Richard Wakelyn's deep eyes and strangely boyish smile. I heard his voice say, "The spectre must be scientifically investigated," and opened my eyes with effort, to find I had just fallen into a dream. Then a sparrow outside ejaculated 'cheep, cheep,' emphatically and another replied. I closed my eyes again with a sigh of relief. It was dawn. 'The wandering shadows, ghastly pale,' had departed and the only trace of them left in my mind was the refrain:

Before I fell in love, O,
Every month was May.

II

The fruit season is begun and I am revelling in my gooseberries, raspberries and strawberries. The humble rhubarb, or 'rhapontick,' as Culpeper calls it, has been finally discarded from the table. In his day it was obviously used only as a medicine, good for all imaginable ills, from ague to ulcers in the eyes, and not an article of food. It is an herb of Mars and first cousin to the dock, according to this authority. I think of making some rhubarb wine, for we have so much in the garden and growing wild in the orchard.

Among my old books is one called *The London Art of Cookery and Domestic Housekeeper's Compleat Assistant*, containing many wonderful recipes for wines and cordial waters, some of whose very

names are 'sweet symphonies.' It is dated 1811 and compiled by one John Farley, "formerly principal cook at the London Tavern," so should be trustworthy. I long to try some of the recipes, but my mind misgives me when I read the number of ingredients required. How could I get fifteen gallons of clarified honey? Or eighty pounds of purified honey? And what is the difference between clarified and purified, that one should be sold by the gallon, the other by the pound? And the names are deceptive. Clary, it appears, which sounds so like claret, is made from raisons; Cyprus wine from white elderberries; English champagne from white currents; Saragossa wine from a decoction of fennel roots, honey and rue. Some, equally attractive names, are made from turnips and the saps of birch and sycamore!

The Cordial Waters intrigue me even more than the wines; their names are so inviting. What could be more suggestively romantic than 'Parfetto's Amore,' made from the best brandy, lemons, cloves, coriander seeds, currants and cinnamon? 'Fever Water' and 'Hysterical Water' are not so enticing, but Lady Monmouth's 'Treacle Water' is a marvel. Here is a nice little recipe to commit to memory—somewhat abridged:

"Take three ounces of hartshorn, shaved and boiled, with borage and succory . . . into a jelly and put them into the still. . . . Take the root of elecampane, gentian, cypress, tuninsil, of each an ounce; blessed thistle called carduus and angelica,

of each an ounce; sorrel roots, two ounces; balm, sweet marjoram and burnet, of each half a handful; lily-convally flowers, borage, bugloss, rosemary and marigold flowers, of each two ounces; citron rinds, earduus seeds, alkermes berries and cochineal, of each an ounce. Prepare all these simples thus. Gather the flowers as they come in season and put them in glasses with a large mouth. Put with them as much good sack as will cover them and tie up the glasses close with bladders wet in the sack. . . . Put cochineal into a pint bottle with half a pint of sack and tie up the glasses close with a bladder under the cork and another on the top wet with sack. Then cover it up close with leather and bury it, standing upright, in a bed of hot horse dung nine or ten days. Then look at it and if dissolved, take it out of the dung . . . slice all the roots, beat the seeds and berries and put them into another glass. Put no more sack among them than necessary; and when intended to distil take a pound of the best Venice treacle and dissolve it in six pints of the best white wine and three of rose water. Put all the ingredients together, stir them and distil them in a glass still."

I read this out to Sally. She listened with a broadening grin, and when I suggested that she should try her hand at making Lady Monmouth's 'Treacle Water,' her reply was short and comprehensive.

"All them mullocks together," she said, "would be only fit for pigs." And really—did women ever

waste their time over making such decoctions? Their days must indeed have been long and empty if they did.

I wonder why the treacle came from Venice!

III

I have just called on Miss Courtney-Smith. Like the Captain of the Mantelpiece, "it was my duty and I did"—with much reluctance. We spent a dry and barren half-hour (it seemed two hours) looking at photographs of 'my cousin the Dean,' his house, garden, and family, with some of his uninteresting friends and relations, to a running accompaniment of simpering chatter. Through the open French window I could see the Rector busy in his garden and longed to join him. Any kind of garden talk, even only of bean and cabbage, would have been exciting in comparison with his sister's drivelling monologue.

It was with relief I inwardly hailed the advent of a tea tray, and the Rector followed presently, looking hot and rather grimy. He was very quiet, either because he was tired, or because it is impossible for two chatterboxes to exist under one roof. It was not till he had drunk three cups of tea that I could get him to speak of his garden; in fact there was little chance of introducing that, or any other, topic without violently breaking into his sister's conversation. But her excellent appetite finally lent us the opportunity.

The Rector is a smallish, thick-set man with a broad face, like hers, and a pleasant smile that comes and goes, not set in a continuous smirk. José says you could not chip off Miss Courtney-Smith's smile with a chisel! He is short-sighted and sees the world through glasses, which, in warm weather, he is continually taking off to polish. He has no affectations, is frank to brusqueness, and has been known to break off in the middle of a sermon and address his bored congregation thus:

"I perceive that you are not attending to me. Perhaps you want your suppers. In that case I won't detain you—And now to God the Father," etc.

He has a monotonous voice and a plentiful lack of inspiration, but he is rather a dear and I like him.

He invited me round his garden after tea and I wish I could reproduce the conversation that ensued. The Rector and I walked abreast, talking of vegetables, while his sister trailed behind us interpolating platitudes, after this wise:

The Rector: "I find that if you don't get your winter greens in early enough the slugs have 'em all."

C. P.: "You advise me then to put some in——"

Miss C.-S.: "The Tomblins' gardener told me that slugs are really the curse of Lord Billing's garden. You see, he was one of his lordship's under-gardeners before he went to the Tomblins—he he—and his place, you know——"

The Rector: "What do you think of my beet-roots, Miss Prescott? Make a good show, don't they? I always grow the round ones in preference to——"

Miss C.-S.: "Like our neighbour, the Marquis of Meadborough. One of his gardeners told me——"

The Rector: "I shall have a fine crop of Fondant pears this year, shan't I? There's a good tree in your orchard, by the way. Is it bearing well?"

V. P.: "I am afraid I don't know the trees by name. But I shall know when——"

Miss C.-S.: "Our cousin, the Dean, always declares that there is no fruit so delicious as the pear. It's——" etc.

Before I left, Mr. Courtney-Smith suddenly recalled himself to a sense of his parochial duties and his blunt voice changed slightly as he asked me if I would not take a class in the Sunday School.

I begged to be excused and his sister regarded me with pained surprise.

"But you would have such a Great Influence, Miss Prescott," she said impressively. "A lady, you know, has so much more influence on that class of person, he he, than anyone else—any common uneducated person, I mean, he he; and if you, with your——"

I interrupted, rather rudely, I fear, to say that I didn't feel qualified for the pious work and that it would be most distasteful to me. The Rector gazed at me mildly through his glasses and made no further comment. He had done his duty, as I had, and the

Captain of the Mantelpiece; there was no more to be said. My refusal did not trouble him in the least. He shook hands with me cordially, at the garden gate; reminded me of the name of some peas he advised me to put in next year; gave me a word of advise as to the growing of leeks, and said he would come and see my garden as soon as he could find time.

IV

I called at the Bede House on my way home and found Felicity giving her sweet peas a stimulant of soot and water. She had almost finished and when we had indulged in a few minutes' adoration of the Aquilegia Glandulosa, daintiest of columbines, in the rock garden, we sat in the walled garden, on a seat arched over with jasmine, and talked of things we loved. Felicity's mind is stored with old poetry, and to hear her soft voice translating Theocritus and Chaucer in that honeyed air, to the song of birds, was enchanting. I had gone there to tell her about my visit to the Rectory and my visitors of the night before, but she made me forget everything save Thyrsis and Daphnis, Nycheia, with her April eyes, and Bombyea—"gracious Bombyea, honey pale, with feet fashioned like carven ivory and a voice drowsy sweet."

"'All breathed the scent of opulent summer, of the season of fruit,' our dear Andrew Lang translates it," murmured Felicity, "and don't you love his prose version? 'High above our heads waved

many a poplar, many an elm tree, while close at hand the sacred water from the nymphs' own cave welled forth with murmurs musical. On shadowy boughs the burnt cicalas kept their chattering toil; far off the little owl cried in the thick thorn brake; the larks and finches were singing, the ring-dove moaned, the yellow bees were flitting about the springs.' It might be here, and now. But isn't it wonderfully interpreted? When I think of my own bald translation, I could weep. FitzGerald too—what he made of the *Rubáiyát!* Valentine, does the miracle of language ever awe you? It does me. It doesn't matter how old the material, how many times the story has been told, the magic of perfect art in the use of words makes it new."

"Is it art," I said, "or inspiration?"

"Ah, that is too big a question for me. But I know that no one in the world could ever teach me to write like that, and art can be taught, I suppose."

We were deep in this discussion when Prudence came out to join us, and the atmosphere was instantly changed.

We talked of divers other matters, of the Rector and his sister, of Lady Monmouth's Treacle Water and of clothes. I often wonder what life would be like if we women attired ourselves in a uniform, like men, and had no variety of dress to ponder and talk over. The fact that men have to wear such hideous clothes, and to shave, almost reconciles me to the misfortune of having been born a woman, the victim of Nature's worst injustice. For I love

pretty things and find an ever-thrilling joy in my frocks and hats and under-garments that no man could ever comprehend. How can he know the exquisite sensation of wearing a lovely gown, looking down at it, feeling its soft texture under one's hands? The very names of our fabrics are enchanting. Crêpe-de-Chine—the word is like honey and moonlight; velvet is like the music of a lute; brocade invokes vision of a courtly past; old lace suggests the delicate web of a sonnet, woven to a perfect pattern. Then there is eolienne, whose name is aerial melody; georgette, ninon, chiffon, dainty and piquant; Shantung that breaths of the East and 'the reign of the Emperor Hwang,' with a dozen other fabrics, soft to the touch, lovely to the eye, with grace in all their folds. I can find it in my heart to pity the man, or too superior woman, who can feel no thrill of pleasure in the choosing and wearing of fair raiment, or even in the thinking of it.

They made me stay to supper, and we went into the old house as the sun sank behind the grey wall and the red roses lost their brilliance. The Bede House is older than Shepherd's Delight and much more imposing. The big hall with its oak rafters and staircase seems made for Christmas mummers, and the great fireplace for the Yule log. In its corners tall lilies, pink and white, shed their fragrance; an ancient spinning-wheel stands in the shadow of the staircase and a very fine carved oak chest occupies the middle of the hall, laden with old

copper vessels and flowers. In the dining-room the snowy cloth was laid, for the Heathers have no mind to adopt new customs, and we sat down to an Arcadian meal of soup, omelette, fruit, junket and ' gooseberry-fool.'

During supper we stayed our talk of new attire and fashions to speak of Dr. Wakelyn. They wished to know what I thought of him. I made the noncommittal remark that he seemed to have a very strong personality. Prudence was enthusiastic about him.

" I'm sure he is the kindest man in the world," she said. " The last time he stayed here, he spent nearly all his time in a cottage, trying to cure a poor soul who had a mysterious disease, which had baffled the local doctors. Of course he is wonderfully clever."

The Devil prompted me and I suggested : " An interesting case to him, no doubt."

The sisters were silent a few moments and looked grave. I knew my remark had pained them.

" Of course the case was interesting," Prudence said then, " but he is very sympathetic. He was sorry for the poor thing, and her family. You see, we have known him from boyhood and know what a kind heart he has, under his dry manner."

" He was such a dear, merry boy," added Felicity, " always collecting something and studying the habits of birds and beasts and insects. We made sure he would become a naturalist, and never dreamt of his going in for medicine. It seemed

such a strange thing for the Squire's son to do. They always went into the army, navy or Church before. His father didn't like it at all, but his mother, the second Mrs. Wakelyn, was rather a determined character and very clever, I believe. She died when we were quite young, and we did not see much of her."

"She was musical," said Prudence, "and used to train the choir and teach them part-songs. The village people loved her. Once when there was an epidemic she and our mother spent most of their time going from house to house, tidying up and looking after the invalids. I've always admired that in her."

"And in your mother," I observed. "She was like you."

"Oh, there is nothing for us to do now, comparatively. There was no resident doctor then and the village was very insanitary. I sometimes think it was those constant outbreaks of fever that first set Richard Wakelyn thinking and made him want to be a doctor."

The dear ladies love to talk about the village and I always listen as attentively as my vagrant mind will permit. But when they dilate upon the virtues of those who have made themselves useful in it, I begin to suspect an ulterior motive of persuasion and suggestion, which makes me feel rather like a butterfly in a hive of bees. And although I distinctly prefer butterflies, especially the darling little blue and red ones, to bees and ants and other

estimable insects, I don't wish Felicity and Prudence to regard me as nothing but a mere cumberer of the earth.

They saw me home, through the silent village and up the road, where couples roamed, interlocked in barefaced bliss. No swain removed his arm from the loved one's waist as we passed, or appeared conscious of our existence. We might have been shadows from another world for aught they seemed to know or care. I wondered how it felt to be lost like that, and said so to my companions, who laughed softly.

"You will know some day, if you haven't yet, Valentine dear," said Prudence, giving my arm a little squeeze. It is well known in the village that she has been loved and sought more than once, and so has Felicity. Mrs. Mee has frequently entertained us with highly coloured accounts of their love affairs.

"I am sure *you* do," I said. "What a pity we have passed the age when the confiding of love episodes is a thrilling part of friendship."

"I should love to hear yours, dear," said Felicity.

"And I yours."

"And yet we can't tell them!"

"They seem so unimportant now, almost laughable!" said Prudence; "yet there was a time when one thought the whole universe revolved round one's self and another!"

"Wasn't it only because we wanted it to be so?" I questioned. "It was a lovely game of romance

and we made it all up, as I used to make up stories in my head. Was it *real*—the obsession? If so, why doesn't it last? Why aren't you both married? Why am I not? I suppose these Strephons and Chloes will marry, as sure as night follows day."

"I wish it were as sure," said Prudence, "and then there would not be so many poor little, unwanted babies in the village."

I shuddered. Such suggestions always make me shudder. I hate them to be connected with love and romance.

"It seems to me," I observed, "that we all want love for love alone, and nothing else. The man is a sort of—superfluity, better imagined than actually known. He is such a disappointment, a disillusion. There's so much of the brute in him. I love a Daphnis and Chloe idyll, as the poets imagine it, but probably not as it really was. If I had a husband, I should like to keep him behind a crystal wall."

They did not understand. Perceptive as they are, I surmised that they thought I was talking nonsense to amuse them. Perhaps it was nonsense, but to be always sensible is so dull. And how can one who is never the same woman two hours running be sensible? I am incurably sentimental and romantic in the woof, but the warp that crosses it is of a different kind of thread, tough in fibre and shrewish, full of strange twists.

They kissed me and departed. I watched them down the white road, standing by the gate with a

strange ache at my heart, as a couple passed, intertwined, with faces beatific in the moonlight.

It is hateful to be such patchwork. How much happier is the maiden compounded of " ribbons and laces and sweet pretty faces," or " sugar and spice and all that is nice "! I want a lover. I want to go wandering down this moonlit road with—what? I could never stand a man at close quarters. I want love, but not kisses. Rossetti's words ran in my head :

> For I still lead my shadow o'er the grass,
> Nor know, for longing, that which I would do.

My state precisely. I desire a lover but am not capable of falling in love like any other woman. I have done with all that. What am I to do? There seems but one resource : to laugh at myself !

CHAPTER XIII

I

LINDA has had her third lesson and begs for a song. I have not allowed her to sing words yet and she is getting restive, but I know she will obey. Already she is gaining some control over her breath and losing the tendency to vibrato, through which so many fine voices wobble to their doom. The worst fault I have to find with her is her lack of discrimination. Everything is 'lovely,' or 'sweet,' or 'ripping,' and the only clue to her taste is the tone in which she pronounces these adjectives. After her lesson I sing a few good songs to her, but it gives me no pleasure. My voice sounds painfully thin and toneless after hers.

"Do you think they will ever let me go on the stage, Miss Prescott?" she said to-day, after I had sung *O ma Lyre Immortelle* and she had exhausted her adjectives. "If I say anything to father and mother about it, they simply say, 'We'll see.' But I have an idea that they think I shall be quite satisfied if I can sing as well as you do."

The *naïveté* of this amused me, though I winced under it. In a moment she realised what she had said and was penitent.

"Oh, I didn't mean that—you know I didn't,

dear, *dear* Miss Prescott. I shall never sing as well as you, of course, but I meant——"

"Don't be a little humbug," I said, laughing. "You know as well as I do that you will not be satisfied to sing as I do; nor do I wish you to be. It is necessary to aim higher than that if you would succeed as an artist. But are you prepared to work—really work? And do you know what that means?"

I delivered a little homily on the subject, to which she listened attentively.

"It is as hard as learning to be an acrobat," I concluded, "and you can imagine the effort that requires. If you're afraid, if you're not prepared for long, monotonous, exhausting hours of dull practice, you must content yourself with being an amateur, clapped at village concerts."

She sprang up. "I'm not afraid, I don't mind hard work. I won't be an amateur." Then her shining eyes clouded. "But what's the good of saying that? They probably won't let me go on with it. Mother is like a hen with a duckling. She would keep me from the water."

"She will not. You have only to convince her of your powers and resolution. Do as I tell you; sing no songs for a month or two; cultivate the passion for perfection, and I promise you that all their objections will disperse like mist before the sun."

Her eyes grew brighter and brighter till a star seemed to shine in each of them.

"Ah!" she breathed; "but it's worth trying for, living for, dying for, isn't it? You shall see how I can work, and you must be very hard on me; bully me, find fault; *make* me do what you want. Don't be soft with me; don't give in. I'll burn all my songs, so as not to be tempted to sing them, and when Father asks me to, at night, I'll say you won't teach me any more if I do. Don't let me fail—make me succeed. I give you my word I will work harder than anyone ever worked before on this earth."

When she had gone I faced myself in self-abasement. The thought of my own poor little efforts oppressed and humiliated me.

"*You* a preacher!" I muttered. "*You* to talk about the passion for perfection! That girl has it, but you have not. You have been content with mediocrity. Is it because you are indolent, or weak-willed, or fickle, or too versatile? There is only one way to pluck

> The silver apples of the moon,
> The golden apples of the sun,

and that is by following, over sharp stones, through brake and briar, one fixed and constant star. Linda will do that. I never shall. There are too many of me—and too many stars!"

II

My roses are a riot of lovely colour. The horrible slaughter of the innocents that I forced myself to do when first I came has resulted in clean bushes and many blooms. There were nights in early May when green fly floated before my vision all night and gave me shudders. I am repaid by this fragrant gratitude. If only human beings were as grateful as flowers! The abundant florescence of my roses makes me doubt the wisdom of much pruning. That lovely, thornless, hybrid Bourbon, Zephyrine Drouhin, spreads her long sprays of vivid pink blossoms widely over her bed and scents the air around her delicately with musk and lemon; the Blush Rambler tries to rival an apple tree in full bloom; Madame Abel Chatanay blushes softly all over her dark green bush, exquisite in tint as mother-of-pearl, and sweetly fragrant. I find her the least satisfactory of all her kind for the house. For twelve hours, perhaps, she remains a dream of dainty delight, and then it is as if her soul had fled. The sheen of her petals is gone; she is dead before she dies.

My kitchen garden is full of lovely things now, heavenly blue anchusa and borage, self-sown poppies —the purple-grey giants with notched grey leaves— tree lupins and sweet rocket, rosemary just shedding her grey-blue petals and lavender just ready to bloom; while the gorgeous nasturtium, the lark's-heel, as our ancestors called it, climbs everywhere,

making a glory over ivied walls and spreading magnificent carpets. Jolly is supremely shocked at my admiration of the lark's heel, and looked at me as if he thought I ought not to be at large when I stopped him from tearing up an insinuating trespasser among his potatoes.

III

Roaming in the wood I was startled to come across a man, lying full length under a tree smoking and reading. My footsteps roused him and he looked round. It was Dr. Wakelyn.

"Take a seat," he said, with no other greeting. "All are free and welcome here, including flies. They have been trying to drive me away and were just about to succeed. I thought a pipe might protect me, but they evidently like tobacco."

"That's the worst of a wood," I said, sitting down as requested; "the poets sing of them, Thoreau and Jefferies, and all the other nature lovers, making exquisite pictures of them, but the flies are always left out. And they really dominate the woods. It's too bad. Why spoil a lovely thing?"

"Beelzebub!" he replied significantly. "To enjoy reading in a wood one should come with a gauze tent and jeer from within at the bloodthirsty demons. Blotches and blains are already my portion."

He looked at his wrists, and I noticed that his skin was as fine as my own. Then he sniffed at

the air and said: "What is the scent that haunts a wood always; something only just perceptible, and quite indescribable? Have you noticed it?"

I said that I had, and loved it. We speculated on it together; was it sweetbrier? honeysuckle? or merely some subtle essence exuding from the foliage of larch and bracken? He quoted Jefferies and then I noted that the book he had been reading was *The Open Air*.

"You like Richard Jefferies?" I asked.

"Yes, in the right mood. He seems the proper person to read in a wood."

"I adore him always—every bit of him."

"A nice, youthful sensation. It is ages since I adored anything."

"What did you adore then?"

"Only a girl."

I laughed. "Oh, romance! Do relate it. This is the very spot for such a story."

"She was"—he paused—"a thing of moonbeams with a face like a flower. How's that for a start? I can't imagine anything more grisly than a woman with a face like a flower, myself, but I feel sure the image will please you. She had the soul of a flower, too, and the heart of—let me see—a spider. I had a very lucky escape from her web, and am glad to say her spell was soon broken. But let us talk of Jefferies. He is more profitable. What do you think of his essay on *The New Voter?*"

I had to think a moment. "Is it about the farm

labourer?" I asked; "he's better off now, and gets good wages."

"You know that, of course; you have made enquiries."

I began to feel rather microscopic under the quizzical glance of his grey eyes.

"I have been told so."

He looked away from me, a delicacy I appreciated.

"One mustn't believe all one hears," was his next remark. "I don't think the farm labourer is well paid, and I wonder how much Jefferies really achieved by his searching and passionate appeal. It is as strong as Hood's *Song of the Shirt*, and how much has that achieved—in a century? Jefferies was a thinker, and a reformer too, in his way, as well as a writer of great prose, and a seer. He could state a case as powerfully as any writer ever known. But even he could not pierce the hide of the unimaginative; the kind of human hog that doesn't care how his fellow-creatures suffer so long as his own swill-tub is regularly filled."

The concentrated contempt in his voice held me silent a moment. Then I said, weakly:

"I suppose we are all more or less thoughtless about others. Few of us live, as I understand you do, in the service of mankind."

He looked surprised. "Who says that?" he demanded sharply.

I did not reply.

"I am the most selfish devil unhung," he exclaimed. "Surely you know, Miss Prescott, that one may

criticise one's fellow-creatures without being a saint oneself; and cherish ideals without living up to them. Pray don't run away with the idea that I set up to be a general benefactor."

"I am not running away with any such idea. But I know you believe we ought to try to be general benefactors—rather than hogs, let us say."

His mouth relaxed its rather grim lines.

"Well, that's my gospel, certainly. Get Felicity Heather to repeat Lord Brooke's lines about the chief use of man to you. I can't spout poetry, it makes me feel a fool; but Felicity will love to do it. And she is one of the few who actually follow the Master she believes in. I doubt whether Lord Brooke did—any more than I do. Shall we cease tormenting these flies by our presence? I am sure they must be tired of buzzing round us for nothing. May we walk back together, or are you seeking further inspiration from the wood?"

"I am going straight to Felicity Heather," I said, at which he laughed.

"But you may not agree with the poet. You live in a world of dreams."

I was startled. How had he made that discovery? I did not deny the accusation. We walked on without speaking again till we came to the gate of the riding. And there was José with the dogs.

"You look like a happy pair in a penny novelette," she observed saucily, "except that I can see daylight

between you. Oh, Uncle Dick! These assignations at your ripe age make me blush."

"A nice change for you, my dear Josephine," he replied blandly, "but it is certainly imperceptible to the naked eye."

IV

Felicity was disbudding carnations, "the curious, choyce clove July-flower," when I launched myself upon her with the enquiry:

"What did Lord Brooke say about the chief use of man?"

It is strange how rapidly our friendship has ripened to intimacy. I feel as much at home in the Bede House now as in Shepherd's Delight, and it seems as if I had known the Heathers from childhood, instead of only two months. Or may I count from the day when I saw Felicity standing by my hired landau as I came out with the agent?

"Dear, how you startled me!" she exclaimed. "What do you want to know about Lord Brooke?"

"Who he was and what he said about man's chief use—or something of the kind. I've been talking with Dr. Wakelyn in the wood—the flies were awful—and he told me to ask you for a quotation from a poem which seems to be his gospel."

She left her carnations, after picking me two perfect blossoms of Leander, and we strolled together round the garden while she said softly:

"I don't know much about Lord Brooke, except

that he was a late Elizabethan poet. I think the lines Richard Wakelyn referred to must be these:

> The chief use, then, in man, of that he knows
> Is his painstaking for the good of all.
> Not fleshly weeping for his own-made woes;
> Not laughing from a melancholy gall;
> Not hating from a soul that overflows
> With bitterness, breathed out from inward thrall.
> But sweetly, rather, to ease, or loose, or bind,
> As need requires, the frail, fallen humankind.

I always think they are beautiful lines," she added simply.

"So they are. And you live by them, I know. So does Dr. Wakelyn, doesn't he? Was he ever in love with you, Felicity?"

"With me!" she smiled, with raised brows. "Oh, no. He's much younger than I am, and we have been too good friends."

"You would have made a perfect pair," I said, "and what do a few years matter? I am sure he must love and admire you."

"And I am sure he does nothing of the kind," she declared, laughing. "Where next will your imagination lead you, carissima? The kind of woman Richard Wakelyn will fall in love with is very different from me. She will have to be lovely and elusive, and, I think, a little wilful and wild and witching. He would like something to tame and master, and something to stimulate his fancy."

"Oh, but I thought he was so practical. José

says he despises all women who are not useful and sensible."

"José doesn't know him. She sees only one face. You remember Browning's words: 'Every man has two soul-sides. One to face the world with; one to show a woman when he loves her.'"

"Then you think," I said, "that he might fall in love with a woman who is not—admirable?"

"Dear, why should he be different from other men?" she asked, shrewdly.

CHAPTER XIV

A TELEGRAM at Shepherd's Delight always causes a flutter. When I opened one next morning from Judith Wills it gave me quite a little thrill of excitement.

"May I come now?" it said, and I wired back "Come." It had been agreed between us that she was to come when she could get away, for Judith is a very busy woman; but I did not expect so sudden a proposal.

I thought she would probably appear in the late afternoon, but when evening came and she did not arrive, I concluded that she would come next day and let me know, by letter, the time of her train. To be quite candid, I was relieved, as I wanted to dine at the Hall, and one can hardly take a friend to a dinner party. This pounce of hers was, moreover, a trifle embarrassing. It is not easy to get meat or fish in a village at short notice, and in summer one does not lay in more food than is strictly necessary.

My preparations for Judith made me late in dressing that night, and the amber crêpe-de-Chine I wore seemed to have developed a countless number of hooks and eyes and other fasteners. I had to call in Sally to my aid before I could get into it.

Consequently I was last at the Hall, where the drawing-room seemed full of people. There were Mr. and Mrs. Stacy from Blossomville, with their son, a pleasant-faced, sporting youth, deeply smitten with José; the Rector and his sister, the two Heathers and myself, beside the house party. José, in a pink frock, looked like a brier rose and prettier than I had ever seen her before. Mrs. Fortescue was in black, as usual, and Mrs. Stacy wore a gown of maroon-coloured velvet, very tight at the waist and low in the neck. Her hair was dressed in a long-departed fashion to match. But the masterpiece of the dressmaker's art was worn by Miss Courtney-Smith. It was of sky-blue silk, so lavishly decorated with rosettes, ruches, fringes, frills and buttons that she appeared like a female Autolycus bearing her wares on her person. And, to crown all, a Greek fillet of broad white satin ribbon bound her scanty, yellowish-grey locks like a bandage. I have no doubt, she believed herself to be the very mirror of fashion.

Dinner parties are all alike in one respect: talk is a mere pumping process for the first two or three courses and only becomes interesting when it is time for the hostess to flash her signal down the table. It must have been with the sweets that Dr. Wakelyn, who sat at my right side, started the topic of credulity and self-deception, which, he said, the medical man had such exceptional opportunities of studying. From his own observation he had come to the conclusion that human beings

could generally make themselves believe anything they wanted to believe, and disbelieve anything they did not want to believe.

"Lewis Carroll put it smartly when he made his Duchess practise believing as many impossible things before breakfast," he concluded. "She is a common type, I assure you."

"Among women only, or do you include men?" I asked.

"Oh, men hug their delusions quite as fondly as women do. The case of the man who believed it was the lobster salad and not the mixture of champagne, port, liqueurs, and whisky that gave him next morning's headache is one in point. Both men and women habitually persuade themselves that the things they like are good for them, and *vice versa*. Whereas, by the law of cause and effect, the contrary is almost invariably the case. Have you never reflected upon the extraordinary capacity of the human mind for lying to itself?"

I squirmed a little inwardly. "But," I said, "wouldn't it be rather a horrid world to live in if there were no delusions about it, and one's self?"

His lips broke into the rare smile that transfigured his face so startlingly.

"You think so? Perhaps it would. But it makes things hard for the unfortunate beings who have to be candid with the self-deluded—the doctor, for example, or the wife, who must encounter anger and opposition. The doctor is the better off: he can get away; but consider the case of a wife

whose husband suffers, let us say, from gout, and persuades himself that rich food and strong wines are good for his constitution. However, there is one virtue in credulity, it lays men open to suggestion, which would be inoperative if men and women were not impressionable and easily deluded."

"Ah, now you are opening up a big subject," I said. "What is suggestion anyhow, and how far is self-suggestion possible? Can I make myself, for example, hear what I expect to hear, or see what I expect to see?"

I was thinking of my ghostly shepherd and, as usual, trying to believe myself deluded.

"Why not? Blood has been made to ooze from the skin through the force of suggestion," he replied.

"I know. I've read about the French girl and the Stigmata. But is it authentic? And is it likely that one could make oneself hear something one would rather not hear? I wonder if——"

There was a movement, a pushing back of chairs. Our discussion ended abruptly.

I was talking with Mrs. Fortescue and Mrs. Stacy over our coffee when he joined me again. The two had been sighing over their hard lot in having to live in the country, far from the London shops, and I was quoting Cowley's words to them when he came up.

> Who that hath reason and his smell
> Would not among lilies and roses dwell;
> Rather than all his spirits choke
> With exhalations of dirt and smoke?

" Ah, Cowley made himself believe that," he said, " but the poets were ever rank self-deluders. Herrick, for example, who wrote so rhapsodically in praise of country life, was very glad to leave ' loathèd Devenshire ' for London, and Cowley certainly did not spend the greater part of his life in that garden he extolled in such fervid, Latinised verse. His preference for roses and lilies over—let us say—theatres and good company, was probably only the expression of a fleeting mood. We all feel like that at times."

" I feel like that always. I like a week in London occasionally, but to live there always—ugh ! I should hate it."

" You think so." He smiled.

" I am sure of it. If that is a delusion, I certainly hug it. There is no beauty in rows of houses all alike; in streets of gaudy shops, in horrible noises, and smells; in crowds of jostling people. Let me live where beauty is, sweet scents, the song of birds, lovely silence and the spirit of romance."

" Romance is everywhere, to one who has imagination to perceive it. The green parks in London are beautiful; the historic river is ever a pageant of movement and colour; the crowds stimulate thought and sympathy. But apart from all that, isn't it man's boast that his soul is independent of externals? Didn't George Herbert express that for us in ' my mind to me a kingdom is,' and can't we make our own world, and dwell among roses even in the heart of a dingy town? I can't agree with your poet

that an atmosphere of dirt and smoke can choke the spirit of man. Look at the heavy, lumpish, soulless clods you find in the country, and think of the fine poems that have come out of garrets and cellars in mean streets. Think of Blake and Lamb. With all due deference to you, Miss Prescott, I am inclined to maintain that undiluted nature is apt to sterilise mind and soul. 'Brooks and blossoms, birds and flowers' are enchanting, of course, but as mental stimulants—no. Are you prepared to state that Herrick wrote his Argument to the *Hesperides* in his country vicarage? I am ignorant, but dare wager he wrote it in London."

His eyes were very dark and steely. I think I have never seen eyes like his before, so extraordinarily expressive, so full of thought and resolution. Before I could answer his challenge, which was eagerly echoed by Mrs. Stacy, the Squire came up and asked me to sing.

I had, as usual, to sing one of my own songs, so chose the last, *My Heart is like an old Spinet*, and I was not sorry to have this chance of trying it on an audience. The result was not as I hoped, but as I expected. It was received with polite attention and tepid applause. Then I sang *Jasmine Nights* and that was, as usual, greeted with enthusiasm. "Charming,"—"sweetly pretty,"—"did you *really* write both words and music? How clever of you!"—and so forth.

Young Stacy then sang about his *Little Grey Home in the West*, just then coming into popular

favour, in a thin tenor voice, quite agreeable to hear, and his mother followed with *The Rosary*. She was said to be ' very musical ' and a great star at local concerts. Her powerful voice was quite untrained, and she sang the choice exotic with tremendously emphatic expression, playing her own accompaniment and keeping her foot on the loud pedal throughout, so that all the chords ran into one another and made an inharmonious jangle very lacerating to the ear. So was the long scream at the finish, resembling the end of a hen's rhapsody over her new-laid egg. It made me shudder, but was greeted with quite a little storm of applause, after which Miss Courtney-Smith was heard to remark that her cousin, the Dean, always declared *The Rosary* to be the most beautiful song he had ever heard.

There was a general request for a contribution to the evening's harmony from Dr. Wakelyn, firmly refused; and then the Squire came forward.

" If he won't, I will, Miss Prescott, just to represent the family," he said; and the tattered copy of *The Yeoman's Wedding* was produced. It was so successful that he unearthed another song and put it before me. But at this there was a protest and an amusing scene followed between Mr. Wakelyn, his sister and daughter.

" You know you always come to grief over it. . . ." " You never can remember the words. . . ." " It's much too high for you," were some of the objections urged upon him. But the Squire, urbane

and smiling, met them all with an unshrinking front, resolved to sing *The Wolf* or die in the attempt.

" Bet you sixpence you don't get through without a breakdown," José sang out, and the Squire accepted the wager blithely. We started.

Shield's classic, as most people know, begins with slow and solemn chords, indicating, I suppose, a dark night and the stealthy approach of a burglar to a silent house. The Squire, putting up his pince-nez, was not ready to come in when he should have done, but made up the time by hustling. He leant over my shoulder to see the words, but, even then, made a sad jumble of them and sang many wrong notes. But it was when we came to the allegro part that the real struggle began between us, and it became a problem who would win on the post. ' Locks, bolts and bars ' flew asunder faster and faster, as the singer ' rifled, robbed and plundered ' with ferocious gusto. Long runs down the scale were interrupted by gasps for breath, and I had to jump whole bars to keep in with the voice. But we came down clean on the last note and I enjoyed the headlong scramble as much as the Squire. I was almost as hot as he was !

There was a burst of hearty appreciation.

" Well done, old thing ! I owe you sixpence," cried José from her alcove ; and the Squire, mopping his brow, beamed jovially.

" I knew I could do it if I had someone to play it properly," he declared, with innocent pride ; " and

if a man couldn't sing to Miss Prescott's accompaniment, he ought to be boiled."

After I had sung *Nymphs and Shepherds* and *Solvieg's Song*, Mrs. Stacy gave us a popular ballad about a lovely garden, and her son sang several songs to her slashing accompaniment while the Rector snored softly in an arm-chair and his sister prattled and simpered to Mrs. Fortescue on the sofa.

I murmured to Dr. Wakelyn Henley's words, "ten men love what I hate," and he flashed back his brilliant smile.

"I believe ten thousand love what I hate," he said, "and yet who dares to doubt the right of majorities?"

The singing was interrupted by the entrance of servants with cakes and iced drinks. Then someone mentioned Linda Walton's voice and an animated discussion followed the announcement that I was giving her singing lessons. Miss Courtney-Smith observed that it was very kind of me, but she thought, all the same, that it was a mistake to put ideas into the girl's head that might make her discontented with the sphere of life into which it had pleased Providence to place her. Mrs. Fortescue concurred and thought it a pity people flattered the girl so much, as it was likely to turn her head. Felicity Heather, in her gentle way, suggested that it could do harm to no one to be taught how to do a thing well and that music was an educative influence. Prudence said that it was no good

trying to crush a talent and reminded Miss Courtney-Smith of the famous person who was blamed for hiding his talent under a bushel. Mrs. Stacy thought cooking lessons would be more useful to a girl in Linda's position and to this there was a little chorus of approval, into which the men entered heartily; all but Dr. Wakelyn, who said quietly: "I should like to hear this girl sing."

"You will some day," I answered significantly. Up to this I had held my peace.

"Where?" he asked.

I dropped my little bomb with some malice.

"In the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden."

Its effect was immense. They sat for a few moments in frozen silence. Then Miss Courtney-Smith bleated faintly: "An opera singer! Really, Miss Prescott, you *don't* think *that*."

"I have no doubt of it—that is, if her mother will let her go and her father provide the money for her training."

Miss Courtney-Smith reiterated "an opera singer" below her breath, in shocked tones, but nobody took any notice of her.

"By Jove, if I believed that, I'd pay for her training myself—for the credit of the village," exclaimed the Squire.

"Father! What tommy rot!" cried José, and I saw a jealous glint in her eyes. I believe she never calls him 'father' unless she is angry with him.

At this point Mrs. Stacy asked if her carriage

might be ordered, and the Rector's sister crossed the room to wake him up, explaining apologetically, not for the first time, that her brother had been gardening all day and was very tired. He, himself, made no apology, but said genially that he hoped he hadn't been snoring, and that music always had the effect of sending him to sleep. Very soon I found myself walking along the road to Shepherd's Delight with Dr. Wakelyn by my side, having parted from the Heathers at their gate and left the Rector and his sister at their turning.

For some time we walked in silence. The night was serene and rather dark; the old moon not yet up. Suddenly he said:

"Why do people love to hear themselves sing?"

"Isn't it natural?" I asked.

"To birds, perhaps. But human beings who profess to love music, to know what *is* music and what is not, should have no desire to sing when they can only make unpleasant noises. They should prefer to listen to those who can sing."

"Oh, dear!" I cried. "You wither me up! How do I know whether I made pleasant or unpleasant noises? How does anyone know? I shall never dare to sing before you again."

"Don't be silly," he said abruptly. "You know you sing well. But my brother and that woman make noises worse than cat-calls—and they must know it."

"But people like noises. Haven't you noticed that? They prefer noise to delicate music, just as

they prefer the silly song-rubbish that comes out yearly in stacks to the thousands of glorious songs that have been written by our greatest composers. I'm not complaining. Their amiable weakness enables me to live in this charming village, in my dear old haunted house. If they did not like silly sentimental songs, mine would not sell. But why do they? Why did those people prefer my feeble stuff to Purcell and Grieg? Can you deny that they did?"

"I'm not going to deny it. Your songs are quite pretty. I liked them myself, especially the first one, about the old spinet, and I've no objection to sentiment when it doesn't slop over. What I do object to is the singing of people who can't sing. They exacerbate me. I want to walk out of the room."

I laughed. "They are rather painful, but I must say I love to hear the Squire sing. He does enjoy himself so, and it is so exciting to race with him up and down hill, jumping bars and skipping runs and trying to come down on the last note with him."

"It must be": he laughed too. "Good old Ted! Yes, he does enjoy it. But why should any man enjoy himself at the expense of his fellows?"

We walked on a little way and then he broke out again with:

"I find your singing the most satisfying thing about you, if I may be permitted to say so; whether you sing your own songs or anybody else's."

"Thank you. I wonder if that is saying much or little."

He made no reply to this angling effort, but went on:

"Your voice is nothing remarkable, of course. I've heard plenty of finer voices, even in drawing-rooms; but I've never heard singing I could listen to all night, as I could to yours."

I made a sweeping curtsy in the middle of the road, but he did not seem to see it, though it was my best minuet curtsy, learnt at school. Evidently he was conferring with himself, as his next remark disclosed.

"I can't quite analyse the reason," he observed; "but I think it must lie in the spell of infinite variety and personality. There are unexpected inflections and cadences, almost like wit in speech, that give it a peculiar charm. Most singers are so monotonous. Having heard one song, you know exactly what the next will be like. And then your phrasing brings out the true spirit of the song you are interpreting, and you don't sacrifice the sense of it to show off your voice, as so many singers do. Your accompaniment is admirable; not a chaos of confused sound, like the accompaniments of that good lady, Mrs. Stacy. Weren't they appalling? I should like to hear you sing every day I'm here. It would do me more good than tonics."

"Aren't you well?" I asked.

"Not quite fit. I don't take holidays when I

am. But what do you say? Will you sing to me—often?"

"With most uncommon pleasure. Haven't you just observed that we all love to hear ourselves sing?"

"And it's true—with exceptions. I'm one. I don't love to hear myself, for example. It gives me a painful shock when I catch myself at it. But you are justified if you like to hear yourself."

"I am glad you think that, because I do love to sing. But I can honestly say that I would rather hear Linda Walton."

"Is she really so good?"

"Her voice is wonderful; as fresh as the dawn and perfect in quality from the low A to C in alt, or higher. Although her scale is, at present, unequal, she hasn't a harsh note in her voice. They are all pure as notes struck on a crystal bell, and have the full, delicious resonance that seems to wrap one round with music, to fill all the air without being loud. The glasses in the room ring, but one's ears do not suffer. And you know how they *can* suffer from a strong voice in a small room. It is a delight even to hear her sing a scale!"

"Then of course she must be trained, whatever it costs."

"You think that." There must have been a note of surprise in my voice, for he said:

"Certainly I think that. Can you doubt it?"

"I thought you might share the general opinion

that, being a woman and a farmer's daughter, she ought to devote her life to domesticity."

He was silent a minute.

"Then you suppose I have no use for the fine arts," he said. "What has made you think that of me?"

I could hardly tell him what José had said, and so made no immediate reply. We approached my garden gate.

"Is it not your idea that a woman should be useful?" I said then; "devoted to the duties of the home, or to good works, nursing, teaching and so forth?"

"I think no woman, or man, should be idle and futile," he responded, rather sharply. "And if you do one thing really well you can't be futile. I've no patience with the parasite and the philanderer, male or female. Is that what you mean?"

Before I could speak again a figure came out of the shadow of my porch and ran down the flagged path between the lavender bushes, just coming into flower; a tall, sturdy figure, very plainly attired, with short hair and a pince-nez perched on her nose.

"Judy!" I exclaimed, embracing her. "Oh, how long have you been here? Why didn't you send for me?"

"Not likely! I wasn't sure, when I wired, whether I could get off to-day, but I found I could

and came right away. Like the Fat Man of Devizes, I love to give my friends little surprises."

"You've given me one, old thing! I think you know Dr. Wakelyn."

"Rather." As they shook hands I seemed to be illuminated with a sudden, and not pleasant, glare of perception. Had Judith come just now because she knew Richard Wakelyn was at Woodside? The question was immediately answered by her next frank statement.

"That was partly the reason I tried to come now," she said. "I knew Dr. Wakelyn was here, with nothing to do all day, so I thought I could talk over certain matters with him, and we might mature some of our felonious little crimes. I never get such a chance in town, when his time is all eaten up by myriads of things and people."

"I'm not going to talk shop, Miss Wills, I warn you," he said, with smiling lips and frowning eyes. "I'm here to rest, and Miss Prescott has promised to sing me into a brief Nirvana. You face me like an accusing conscience! I thought I'd got away from London."

"Deluded mortal! As if you could ever get away from London. But you do need a rest, and so do I. Val shall sing us to sleep. I won't worry you more than is absolutely necessary. You are glad to see me, aren't you, Val? If not, I return to town by first train to-morrow morning."

"Of course I'm glad. Haven't I been begging

you to come for weeks? I hope Sally has given you a decent meal and made you comfie."

"Meal, is it? She has fed me as one stuffs a prize pig! I grew somnolent under her feeding and have been asleep on your sofa for hours."

When Dr. Wakelyn had gone, we went up to bed and I sat in her room to talk while I unfastened my gown and took down my hair.

"Fluffier than ever," she said. "Beautiful moon-butterfly—how your iridescent wings glitter! But, do you know, I'm rather sorry I came now."

"Why?"

"The first pang of doubt came when I saw you and the doctor meandering up to the gate, absorbed in each other. I didn't suppose you'd fraternise—two such widely different mortals, with such widely different interests in life. There's no moonshine about Dr. Wakelyn."

"Don't be absurd, Judy. I've seen the man only three times. And we were not 'absorbed in each other.' As you say, he is not my kind; we have nothing in common."

She looked at me through her glasses, meditatively, her head a little on one side.

"I wonder," she drawled. "There are possibilities of moonshine in quite unlikely places. I had never imagined that Dr. Wakelyn could stroll along a country road with a fluffy young woman and look as if he liked it. I've only seen the other side of him."

"It's past midnight and time we went to bed,"

I said severely. "You must be very tired to talk such nonsense, Judy."

In my own room I asked myself whether I was really glad or sorry she had come. The answer made me uneasy, since it involved another, and more awkward question.

CHAPTER XV

I

JUDITH WILLS and I have been friends from childhood. She lived in the same town and we went to school together; but she gravitated to Newnham and a Moral Science Tripos, after which she took up chemistry and became a dispenser. When her father died her mother took a flat in London and they lived there till she died, a few years ago. She left Judith enough money to live on comfortably and so, ever since her death, Judith has ceased to work for money, bestowing all her knowledge, energy and administrative ability on boards and committees. She is a very capable organiser and is always immersed in business of a benevolent or reformative character.

She indulges in passionate crazes and just now her passion is for slum babies. She burns to reform the methods of slum mothers and put an end to the annual slaughter of the innocents that goes on so appallingly in our so-called civilised countries. This enthusiasm for babies brings her up against the terrible conditions of life in certain parts of London, and she has taken up the housing problem with ferocious vigour. She is on an east London

School Board and hopes to get on the County Council. What with crêches, infant welfare centres, school clinics and her crusade against slum landlords, Judith spends a feverish life. She calls it visiting! It wears her out and she looks very white and pinched, but I hope to put some colour in her face before she leaves me.

Her work has brought her into contact with Dr. Wakelyn, who is the principal pathologist on the staff of a great East End Hospital near which she has taken up her abode. They have the same ideals, the same ends in view; both are tremendously concerned to heal the world's horrible sores and make it more fit for generations to come; both are prodigious workers and incessant plotters against the peace of the comfortably content. When I am with Judith I always think of Carlyle's analogy of the earnest man as a wedge or beetle, driving his ideas into humanity's thick head, making his way through every obstacle by sheer force. Judith is like that. She never relaxes, never lets go, knows exactly what she wants and makes for it as directly as a homing rook for his tree. Nothing deflects her.

She tries, I am sure, not to despise me, and her affection is proof against her disapproval of what she considers my low aim in life. But it always amuses me to emphasise it for her benefit and pretend to be even more frivolous and pleasure-loving than I really am. The only revenge she takes is to scarify my ears with her horrible bogies, the worst being

the dread disease transmitted to babies by disgusting parents. I believe she loves to see me wriggle on the pin of horror she drives into me, as if my interest in the matter would save a single infant or reform a single reprobate! It is all very well for born reformers to dwell upon atrocious evils and spend their lives in trying to eradicate them; but I have no bias in that direction. Sooner than spend my life in thinking about them, and fighting them, I would indulge in a rope and add another ghost to Shepherd's Delight!

In a world of beauty why seek for dung-heaps? It is bad enough to have to kill green fly on one's rose-bushes. There I draw the line!

As soon as Judy mentions the detested word I change the subject promptly by calling attention to my roses or lavender and protesting that she does not appreciate my garden.

"You never will be serious a moment," she said reproachfully when, two days after her arrival, I was clipping lavender. I had listened attentively enough to her plans for reform till the entrance of the detested word made me ask her if she noticed the wonderful effect of the setting sun on Adam's foliage, gilding his amorphous outline.

"I am quite serious. The lovely things of this world seem to me quite as worthy of serious consideration as the ugly ones," I replied. "Now you don't seem to be even aware that 'Midsummer, like an army of banners, is moving across the heavens.' The glorious pageant passes before your unseeing

eyes, which are focused upon disease and other hideous things I strive to forget."

She was silent a few moments.

" Has it never occurred to you, Val, that if everyone forgot, or ignored them, they would in time blot out the beauty of the world? Someone has to be fighting continually against the forces that make for chaos and dissolution. Your garden should teach you that. And I can hurl quotations at you, if it comes to that. What does Kipling say?

Seek your job with thankfulness and work till further orders,
If it's only netting strawberries or killing slugs on borders.

Somebody's got to kill the slugs, you know."

I had to admit that she scored.

" Of course I realise that. But can't the killing go on without obsessing and enslaving each individual fighter to such an extent that they can think and speak only of slugs? "

" The soldier in battle can think of nothing but how to conquer his foes."

" I'm told the soldier in battle thinks of nothing at all but how to get through with his life! But I am not a fighter, anyway. I can't even kill a slug on a border. Green fly is enough for me. Do forget your London slugs, Judy, for a week or two, and live in a lavender atmosphere. It used to be thought a disinfectant, you know. Culpeper says it is possessed of hot and subtil spirits, fierce and piercing."

Judith finds the Heathers more sympathetic.

I took her to see my dainty '*Dames de Faïence*' the day after she arrived. They came to tea next day. She was charmed with them. They encouraged her to talk of the things nearest her heart, as I never can; and, although Felicity winced more than once, she did not flinch from Judy's horrors. I suppose familiarity with repulsive sights and smells by cottage sickbeds rendered her more or less invulnerable to any mere description. She, as well as Prudence, seemed interested in all that Judith had to tell them about London slum life, but I noticed that Felicity did not enjoy her tea, and concluded that she was experiencing some degree of the nausea with which such unsavoury details always afflict me.

We had left the slums and were discussing a new novel whose hero had, according to reviews, described with meticulous accuracy, and at great length, his sensations in the dentist's chair and the furniture of the dentist's room. Judith was pleased to call this 'realism' and admired it, as against what she called the 'pretty pretty' school.

I said it always reminded me of Holmes's Katydid poem:

> Thou say'st an undisputed thing
> In such a solemn way.

"I call this kind of work 'Katydid literature.' Who wants to be told the colour of the rep curtains in the dentist's room, or how your mouth tastes after a tooth is drawn? And anybody can do it. It requires no imagination and no talent, that I can

discover. Moreover, it is generally allied to a commonplace and conventional disposition. The conventions of that school are a *cliché* infinitely more hardly set than the old schools of romance and sentiment. And as for realism—is nothing real but the ugly and banal? "

Judith contested. I kept up the subject. Felicity and Prudence threw in a word now and then. Anything was better than the slum topic. But we were not sorry to have a diversion when Dr. Wakelyn appeared and proposed music.

Judith says she likes music. Her liking for it is tepid, I suspect, and partly based on the opportunity it affords her for thinking about diseases and slum babies. But she is a good listener, or appears to be.

I sang Gluck's *Chiamo il mio ben cosi*, Cherubini's *Ave Maria*, several songs by Tchaikowsky and Dvorâk, *Where'er you Walk* and my favourite old song, *Have you Seen but a Whyte Lillie Grow?* Then I played some Handel Gigues and Sarabandes, of which I never tire, and finally essayed Mendelssohn's E. Minor Fugue, to my own great pleasure. I cannot play it as it should be played, but I love to try.

" If I could play and sing as you do, Val," said Judy when I rested, warm from my exertions, by the open window, " I should want to do it for the glory of God."

" Perhaps I do."

" No. You do it for your own pleasure."

"And what better motive can inspire the artist?" I cried. "Isn't it better than for love of applause, or to make money? Shouldn't the artist paint for love of painting; the singer sing for love of singing; the writer write for love of writing?"

"Why not do all those things for the love of giving pleasure to others? The work girls of London, for instance. If you could sing and play to them, teach them the love of beautiful things, keep them out of mischief, you would be doing something for the glory of God."

"That is what we tell her," said Prudence, smiling. I shot a glance at Dr. Wakelyn, but he did not meet my eyes.

"I have heard the same sentiment from Miss Courtney-Smith," I observed drily, "it would be so good for the village maidens to have the benefit of my influence and instruction. Unfortunately I cannot think that I was ordained to be an influence for the good of village—or London—maidens. It might be the reverse, you see; I might make them as frivolous and epicurean as myself. Who knows? Don't you realise, Judy, that it takes all sorts to make a world. You don't blame a goat for not being a sheep, a cat for not being a dog, a butterfly for not being an ant. Why then expect me to be, like yourself, obsessed by a yearning to benefit my kind? I don't want to influence anybody, still less to live in your old London, which I abhor."

At this Dr. Wakelyn caught my eye and smiled.

I think he knew these sentiments were intended for his delectation. But he made no remark, and a few minutes later he took his departure with the Heathers.

Judith put her hands on my shoulders when they had gone and looked into my eyes.

"You didn't mean a word of it," she said. "You love to influence people and you are not satisfied with merely existing beautifully. I don't care what you say. I know you better than you know yourself, Val."

"So you think! But aren't you rather a brute, Judy, a snake coming into my paradise and trying to spoil it for me?"

"Only for your good, darling."

"I'm quite happy."

"You think you are."

"Do you suggest I'm not?"

"You are not so happy as you might be. No one can be who lives in a nutshell."

"Oh, the village is big enough for my little ego."

"I didn't mean the village."

"What then?"

"Your little self. Have you never watched a jumping bean, one of those queer things that are moved in jerks by a tiny organism inside them? And can you imagine the creature is happy?"

"You flatter me! Am I so limited, so enclosed?"

"Nothing shuts one in like egoism."

"We are all egoists, if it comes to that. You do what you prefer to do and why may not I?"

My temper was rising. Who would care to be likened to the parasite inside a jumping bean?

She was instantly penitent.

"Forgive me, Val, and don't think me an awful Pharisee," she exclaimed. "You know I don't believe you can live for long in a land of moonshine. I'm only warning you."

"Croaking old raven!" I grimaced at her. "Moonshine's my natural element, just as fog and soot and grime are yours. I believe you and Dr. Wakelyn revel in exhalations of dirt and smoke! Give me this scented garden—lavender, sweetbrier and evening stock. See, the jasmine is coming out—alas! that's a sign of waning summer."

"And when the winter comes, and the sodden plants throw off their exhalations of decay and corruption, what then?"

"My cosy ingle nook, a fire of logs, books, music and the Heathers. You'll never get me to London, Judy, so don't try."

She looked at me with a queer glint in her eyes and a funny smile round her thin lips.

"I don't flatter myself that *I* could ever get you to London, Val," she said, "but '*l'homme propose*'—you know the proverb. I don't despair of seeing you there some day."

She is a provoking woman, with her innuendoes. There was nothing to say, so I said it.

I should not mind her thinking me an egoist if I did not know myself to be one. We always hope

that our secret knowledge of ourselves is not shared by our friends!

II

After Linda Walton's next lesson an idea came to me. Judith was impressed by her voice, which she heard from the garden, and when the girl had gone she said: "You were right. I thought your goose might be one of your romantic swans, but she is a swan, sure enough, a *rara avis*. What do you propose to do with her? How far can you train her?"

"Very little further. She ought to be in London, of course, or in Milan. But her people are of the duck tribe, and don't recognise their ugly duckling for what she is—yet. I think they will, and let her go in time. Are you surprised at a simple farmer and his wife objecting to send their young daughter up to the great Babylon alone?"

"Good lord, no! But it is done every day. They must get used to the idea."

Then it was that my idea flashed upon me.

"Will you take her in?" I asked.

"Me! Is it me, then? Take in a strange young girl—hamper myself with a fresh responsibility! What should an old maid like me do with a girl? She'd be miserable and I should want to wring her neck."

"You wouldn't: you'd love her. She's a lovable

girl and would adore you. She could practise when you were out. Think it over, Judy."

"Absurd!" she ejaculated. And I felt as though the matter was settled. Judy is one of those decisive characters with whom hesitation implies consent. If the idea had not appealed to her she would have vetoed it promptly and firmly. I worked upon her feelings craftily the next few days, not sorry to show her that my egoism was, at least, sufficiently elastic to stretch over another person's interests in life; and, in the end, she accepted my carefully instilled suggestion that it would be very selfish on her part to refuse.

But the Waltons were not easy to manage. When I told them that my friend would take Linda into her flat for a month or so, until a suitable lodging in London could be found, they did not jump with gratitude at the offer. That they did not absolutely resent my interference was the most that could be said.

They thanked me politely and gave the answer that always drove Linda to despair: "We'll see—we'll think it over." But I had called for the express purpose of wringing their consent to my proposal for a tentative three months in town under a first-class master, and I did not leave it at that. After a somewhat fervid exhortation I concluded by making the following proposal to them.

There was to be a concert at the annual flower show in the Hall grounds on the 25th August. If

Linda sang, and if she created the sensation that I expected, would they let her go to London? If the Squire said that she ought to be trained, would they accept his verdict?

"All I ask is that she should study for three months and then take the master's verdict. If he thinks my judgment worthless and Linda's voice unable to bear the strain of operatic training, of course there would be an end of it. But I have every confidence what that verdict will be; such confidence that I am willing to advance Linda the money for her training, in the certitude that she will be able to pay me back in a very few years. Of course I may be mistaken, but I am prepared to back my opinion, feeling no doubt of the issue."

I did not think I could have spoken so warmly on any matter that did not concern myself; and I certainly had no intention of investing capital in Linda's voice when I started to argue. But there is a streak of obstinacy in my character, and we all love to prove ourselves right in a cherished opinion.

Mr. Walton looked down on the floor, Mrs. Walton was very pale, and held her lips compressed. Then he looked up and said, with dignity:

"It is not a question of money, Miss Prescott. There is no sacrifice we would not make for our children, if we are convinced it's for their good. I don't like the stage for Linda, neither does her mother. We don't like her going to London—though it's very

kind of your friend to offer her a home. We want her at home, where her place can't be filled." There was a little crack in his voice that touched me profoundly. "I don't suppose you can understand——"

I interrupted to disclaim this. He went on: "She's the greatest comfort to her mother—all of us; we should miss her badly. But if it's got to be, we shall not stand in Linda's light. We'd rather have her here with us than see her the greatest opera singer in the world; but there it is. We can't have the girl unhappy for our pleasure, and if she's set her heart on going to London she must go. I can't say more."

I came away feeling a monster. The silence of the garrulous Mrs. Walton during this speech impressed me as much as her husband's rough eloquence. I seemed to see into the depths of their hearts, and it made me miserable for a time. But, after all, I argued to myself, nothing could have stopped Linda. I was a mere agent in the matter. She could not stay in this village, wear out her life here. It was impossible that her voice could be hidden away.

III

I saw a good deal of Dr. Wakelyn during the fortnight he was at the Hall and had several interesting talks with him. Sometimes I was only the listener when he and Judith talked sociology and,

as she called it, 'matured their felonious little crimes' against things as they are. "We believe in making ourselves a nuisance," she said once; "it's the only way to get things done." But Judith went back to London before he did and so I had opportunities of dialogue with him. He would appear suddenly before me in the garden and interrupt my fruit-picking, or snipping off of dead flowers, with the words: "I've come for my tonic." Upon which I went meekly into the house and sang, or played to him till I was tired.

The last time he did not wait for me to stop, but said, after I had sung Parry's setting of *My Heart is like a Singing Bird*:

"That'll do. Best to end on a perfect thing. You might spoil it by singing a less perfect. Besides, I want to talk."

"What shall we talk about?" I asked, as we went out to the verandah and settled in the two long chairs there. It was evening and the shadow of my little Hermes was thrown along the grass. The delphiniums and Madonna lilies by the yew hedge opposite were nearly over and the only colour effect came from the soft lilac of a clump of catmint against some pink carnations in a corner.

"Whatever you like," he said lazily, beginning to stuff his pipe.

"I had a letter from Judy this morning. She has plunged into the thick of it again and is revelling

in opposition, as usual. What a wonderful woman she is!"

He agreed and delivered a warm little panegyric on her many virtues. I felt a little sinking of the heart as I wondered if he were comparing us—to my disadvantage.

"She is all you say," I declared; "a real treasure of a woman, with a heart of gold, a brain of superfine quality. It is always amazing to me that no man has snapped her up long before now. Why is it?"

"I suppose because we are mostly fools," he observed. "We admire that type and marry the opposite. Then we grumble at our hard lot!"

I laughed. "Candid! But you have managed to escape that hard lot."

He shot at me a queer look.

"I'm not so sure. You never know what may pounce on you. So far I've been too absorbed in other things to think of marriage."

"In your profession, I suppose—diseases and their cure."

"Yes, especially one disease."

I knew what that was and shuddered. My mother had died of it.

"You have gone in for research," I said; "have you discovered anything? I know what physicians all over the world are trying."

His eyes lighted. "Yes, for the *cause;* we must find that out first. It is the greatest hunt in the

world, the most exciting; more absorbing than anything else could possibly be. If, after a life's work, I can make any contribution towards that knowledge I shall die happy."

He spoke with suppressed passion. I heard it thrill in his voice, and was thrilled by it.

"Why do you feel like that?" I asked, in a low voice. "It is nothing that affects you personally. Most people are content to enjoy the goods the gods provide and accept this 'sorry scheme of things entire' as it stands, without bothering to alter it. Why not you?"

He was silent.

"Isn't this world beautiful enough?" I continued. "Why think of horrid things when you can look at lovely ones and forget them? That reflex colour from the sunset, for example."

The east was barred with rose and amber on an opal sky—the soft tint in which the new moon always appears. She was not visible, being only a thread, yet I knew she must be floating somewhere in that opal sea. But Dr. Wakelyn was not looking at the beauty before us; he was looking at me and I found his penetrating gaze disconcerting. One imagined a butterfly on a pin, under a magnifying glass! Still an impish spirit drove me on. I wanted to draw him.

"Is it worth while," I said, "to fret over the evils that exist? If you find the cause and cure of one disease, will not another arise to baffle you? It

seems to me it has always been so, and always will be, so long as man sins and the world is what it is."

"What is it?"

I stared at him. The question was unexpected. He repeated it.

"This world, what is it? What do you, or I, know about it? What does the mystery of life conceal? What is the incentive to endeavour? What makes us rebel against the apparently 'sorry scheme' and long to better it? What are sin and disease if not manifestations of some force against which it is our fate to struggle? And why should we feel compelled to struggle if we can never conquer? There must be logic behind the universe, or how has man evolved it? Why is the sunset beautiful to you and me? It is not so to the sheep grazing in a pasture. The fact that its beauty appeals to us is our call to arms. It summons us to combat all the old primeval things from which we have emerged through the ages—the grisly host that would draw us back to chaos. Is it worth while? There is no choice, as I see it. We must fight or rot."

He rose abruptly and knocked out the contents of his pipe, mechanically, against the post of the verandah. There were no ashes; the spark had gone out almost as soon as it was kindled.

"I must go—good-night," he said, and without another word, without taking my hand, he left me.

Was there ever such a man? I can't get him, or his words, out of my head. He called next day, with José, to say good-bye, and has gone back to town. So there's an end of him, for I shall try to forget his existence. We should never agree.

CHAPTER XVI

I

THE Flower Show is over. The day was fine and the paper chains and roses hung, with green branches, from house to house floated in a light breeze that did not break them. All the folk for miles round swarmed into Woodside, and its queer, up-and-down, winding streets were gay with many colours and chattering voices. Cars and carriages, char-à-bancs and bicycles pulled up at the Dewdrop Inn (generally known as the ' Do drop in ') and Jolly Waggoners, or at the Hall and different farmhouses. Two large marquees for the display of flowers, fruit and vegetables, with a smaller one for refreshments, had been erected the day before, and a travelling showman had brought a merry-go-round and swing-boats, so there was no lack of entertainment for the jolly crowd that surged in after five o'clock, when the price of admission was lowered.

At six we gave our concert, on a platform flanked by trees in a remote corner of the grounds, far enough from the grinding organ of the swing-boats, while the band from Meadborough was taking its tea. When the time came for my first song I found myself, as usual, so piteously nervous that I could hardly stand still for the shaking of my knees. It was a

new experience to sing in the open air. Felicity, who was accompanying me, was equally nervous, and it was lucky for us both that I had chosen the easiest of songs, which made small demand either on the singer or the player. I had wanted to sing Lane Wilson's setting of *A Pastoral*, which suits my light, high voice; but had been persuaded to change it, and a song of Parry's, for two of my own, so that 'Miss Valentine Prescott has kindly promised to sing some of her own famous songs' could be billed as an attraction (?). For the second song I put down the new one, *Love is Life*, with which my publishers are highly pleased. They are giving me improved terms and sent a proof two days before the concert. As I anticipated, *My Heart is Like an Old Spinet* has not sold as well as my other songs.

My voice sounded distressingly thin and weak, floating away on the air with, apparently, no directing force, and I had a panic that spoilt my breathing until after the first verse, when a sporadic burst of applause gave me fresh courage. I was ashamed of my performance, but the audience seemed pleased, and there was quite a respectable attempt at an encore, to which I did not respond.

When I mounted the platform again, a little later, to play for Linda, my emotions were strangely confused. I wanted her to make a sensation, and yet I hoped the audience would not prefer her singing to mine. Such hateful things lurk in one's soul! For the moment I was ready to be jealous

of Linda. But only for a moment. The first few bars of the song dispelled that abject spirit, and I rejoiced in the beauty of her voice as if it had been my own, with a sense of personal triumph in her success.

It had not been easy to choose the right song for her, a song not too hard to learn in a fortnight, that would yet show off her voice and dramatic power. After much cogitating, my choice fell upon *Le Parlate d'Amour* (set down on the programme as 'The Flower Song from *Faust*'), and she learnt it, of course, in English. It was the recitative in the middle that decided me, with its opportunity of passionate emotion; and I felt sure that the declamatory defiance at the end: "Satan, I mock at thy lies!" would thrill her audience.

It did. I felt it shiver all through me. Linda is not troubled with nervousness. She was frightened, of course, when she stepped on to the platform, but in a few seconds all fear left her, and she sang with perfect confidence in herself, her voice, and *me*. I had told her what to do, when to breathe, when to pause, when to lower her tone, and she forgot very little. But she added a great deal that no master could teach her: that personal magnetic force that plucks a chord in human hearts and governs crowds. It was great singing from an almost untaught girl of nineteen, and all envy was quenched in admiration.

The crowd simply shouted. Many who had not

troubled to draw near for the concert hurried up at the sound of that clarion voice and joined in the rapturous encore. She sang *My Heart is Like an Old Spinet* and that again was encored. I realised then that it was in her power to make the fortune of any song she chose to sing.

The Squire came up to me with a serious face.

"It's a gold mine, isn't it?" he said; "I should like to invest in it, and have told her father so. But he seems to want all the shares for himself. You need worry no more about her training. That matter has been settled to-day, I'm sure."

Ten minutes later I met Mr. and Mrs. Walton. There was no mistaking the look on their faces. I congratulated them, and Mr. Walton laughed.

"You're a young lady who is used to getting her own way," he said; "and you've managed it neatly this time. But a village success doesn't mean she'll astonish the world."

"She will, though," I replied. "You can no more hold her back than——"

I stopped, transfixed by the sound of a voice. There, talking to Linda, at a short distance, was my brother, Clive!

"Thought I'd give you a thrill," he said, grinning at my amazement. "I heard you sing, and Miss Walton too. I've just introduced myself and was going to look for you."

While he was speaking José came up, and I introduced her.

"I should have known you anywhere from your photograph," she declared. "You are exactly like it—only more so. I'm glad you've turned up, because I know you must be hungry and will make Val come in and grub with us."

I did not like the way she turned her back on Linda Walton, after a mere nod of recognition, and I noted the girl's quick flush, as she went off with her father and mother. It made me refuse José's invitation, but I had to give in when Clive said he was starving and that of course we would accept. On our way to the Hall, José laid herself open to a snub, and received it.

"I did enjoy your singing, old thing," she said, giving my arm an affectionate squeeze. "Wasn't it topping, Mr. Prescott? I liked your songs fifty times better than Linda Walton's. That girl really tires one; she has such a tremendous conceit of herself. She makes a lot of noise, and, of course, that is what the people love. But there's no real music in her voice."

"What!" exclaimed Clive, before I could speak. "No music—noise! Oh, come, I say, Miss Wakelyn, you're joking. Why, the girl has simply the most glorious voice I've ever heard. What do you say, Val?"

"I am of your opinion. But Miss Wakelyn does not profess to be musical," I said coldly, and José flushed up to her eyes. She made no further remark. What could she say?

I was tired and the evening at the Hall tired me more. *The Yeoman's Wedding* and *Will-o'-the-Wisp* got on my nerves, and when Clive was persuaded to sing a sea chanty, I vamped it badly. But in spite of my weariness and irritability, stretched to breaking-point by Mrs. Fortescue's prattle about nothing and the yapping of a dog outside, I could not help being amused by José's open courtship of Clive. She is transparent as a wraith, and can never conceal anything she feels. Clive pleased her, as his photograph had pleased her, and he is really a charming fellow. There are few young men in the district, and they are all rather dull. I have often felt sorry for José, and other girls here; they certainly do not get a fair share of masculine society. Clive blossomed under her appreciation and told some good stories, at which the Squire laughed immoderately. The boy enjoyed himself so much that I had much ado to tear him away before midnight. When, at last, I achieved this, José suggested that her father and she should walk home with us. He was tired, poor man; he had been making himself agreeable all day to hosts of people; but she told him he was simply lazy and a walk would do him good. As usual she had her way, and we set off, in two pairs; the Squire, of course, being my companion.

As we went in, I asked Clive what he thought of José—wasn't she a jolly girl?

"Oh, quite good sport," he said; "but that Walton girl is more in my line. Are you friendly with

her—I mean apart from teaching her to sing? I should like to see her again."

Then I felt sorry for José.

II

To-day I felt a little sorry for Clive. Linda came in the evening to tell me it was all settled about her going to London. She was in a very natural state of effervescence and poured out her gratitude effusively.

"You have been a perfect angel to me," she declared; "and if ever I am a great singer—I mean moderately great, for of course——"

"No humbug," I interpolated sternly.

"Well, if I succeed it will be all due to you. And I shall bless you for ever and ever."

"Or curse me! You know what Oscar Wilde said."

"No, I don't know anything about Oscar Wilde, except that he did something dreadful and went to prison. You forget how ignorant I am."

"He said that there are two tragedies in life, not getting what you want, and getting it; the last being the greater tragedy. I forget the exact words."

She meditated upon this gravely.

"That's all very well," she said then; "but if Oscar Wilde had had to live in a farmhouse with people who thought about nothing but meals from

morning to night, and if he'd had the prospect of that before him all his life, perhaps he would have longed for something to happen—even a tragedy! If you get what you want and are sorry, at least you've *had* it. I'd rather be sorry than not have it. Wouldn't you, now?"

I had to confess that I would.

"But, Linda, you are a little hard on your mother when you suggest that she thinks of nothing but meals all day. I am sure she is interested in lots of things—in the village affairs, and the church, and——"

"Oh, I know," Linda broke in. "She's a great dear, of course, and she has a mind. I always think Mother is really clever. But what I mean is, she is always absorbed in the house, in keeping everything clean and tidy, and arranging meals four times a day. I don't say it's her fault, or that she can help it. She simply hasn't time to think of anything else. And it's got to be a sort of habit now. She's proud of doing it well, and likes people to say what a splendid housekeeper she is—and all that. So that now she really isn't interested in much else; certainly not in books and poetry and music, like you are."

"Oh, I'm a useless sort of person, you know. I suppose it is a woman's real mission in life to make a home for some man, rear a family and care for their comfort before everything else. What would become of us all if they didn't?"

" I don't know," said Linda, and there was a pause. I was heartily in sympathy with her, but what was the good of saying so? She knew it well enough, in spite of my well-meant attempts at reproval.

" I suppose," she went on, " that some girls don't mind, even like it; and, as you say, they're very useful and necessary and all that. But sooner than live a life like Mother's, having to think of nothing but food, cooking, cleaning, preserving, ordering, paying, changing servants, and thousands of little things that have to be done in a house, I would tie a brick round my neck and drop into the duckpond."

" You wicked girl ! " I said, trying not to laugh. " Of course you would do nothing so futile. Somebody would see you and drag you out, all wet and slimy, and you would be sent to a lunatic asylum. Instead of which you will, before long, doubtless fall in love with a nice, commonplace young man and will enjoy looking after a home of your own. It is only because there are no young men about here for you to fall in love with that you talk so wildly."

" It's *not*," she declared, emphatically. " If there were fifty, all sighing at my feet, it would be the same. And if ever I fall in love with a man, I won't marry him. He may get someone else to plan his meals ! "

" Can you do without them yourself? "

" Of course I can—or could. What's better

than biscuits and cheese, or tinned salmon and bread? I could live on anything without all this fuss about meals. Have you ever thought, darling Miss Prescott, of the time that is wasted every day on laying tables and washing up? It's simply appalling! Why can't we live as the birds do?"

At this point Clive came in and we had a lively discussion. He agreed with her entirely, and declared that women make far too much fuss over food and servants and housekeeping. I was amused, remembering the demands of his appetite and the adverse criticism that he, with the other boys, had been apt to indulge in when their food had not been exactly to their taste. However, it was plain to see that Clive would have subscribed to any theory Linda offered, and if she had suggested living on nuts and apples he was ready to agree.

When I had heard enough of their nonsense I asked Linda to sing, and Clive sat entranced while her golden voice filled the room. He would have kept her singing all night, I believe, but supper was announced and afterwards she had to go, for the Waltons are early people and her mother did not like her to be late. Clive went home with her, and as I watched them stroll up the road together, his face turned eagerly towards hers, I thought of José and his words the night before—"quite good sport." Obviously he did not regard Linda as 'good sport'; his manner towards her was too subdued and serious for that. What did he think her? A goddess,

an ideal, a heroine of romance? I mused over the strange fact that men, and perhaps women too, are swayed through the fancy, rather than brain, heart, or even flesh. Linda had captured Clive's fancy and he was ready to fall at her feet. Would she respond? I thought not. What kind of rival was my blithe, simple brother to that shining vision of opera, that Lohengrin in silver armour, now dazzling Linda's eyes? And so I felt sorry for Clive.

III

It was impossible to lead my ordinary life while he was with me. He was restless as a bluebottle. He wanted to ride—sailors always want to ride, I am told; he wanted to go somewhere every day; he insisted on driving me into the town and buying outrageous things. The Squire lent him a horse and he went riding with José, with whom he played tennis at all hours of the day. He made friends with everybody; treated the village children to unlimited sweets and biscuits, and spent some evenings at the Dewdrop, drinking beer and yarning to the little company of old stagers there. He played in a village cricket match and practised on their pitch several fine evenings. How he managed to see anything of Linda amid these various occupations, I don't know, but he evidently did, for on his last night I received a shock.

He had been very silent and preoccupied all day.

It was wet and he had not been able to play tennis with José as usual. After supper he said that he thought he would stroll round to the Wakelyns for a game of bridge, and I thought he had gone there. I was, therefore, unprepared for what followed.

He came in about eleven, very wet and looking as black as a thundercloud.

"Beastly night," he said, shaking his cap with savage energy over my chairs and tables. "Can I have a drink, Val?"

I saw that something was the matter, and presently asked what it was. For a time he refused to tell me. Then it came out that he had asked Linda to be engaged to him and she had refused.

At first I dissembled, pretending I thought the 'she' of his incoherent story was José.

"José!!" The scorn conveyed in the word was withering.

"Why not?" I asked.

"You must be a blithering idiot, Val, if you think I should ever fall in love with a girl like José," he said. "A good pal, of course—but—but she's like another man, and not my sort at all."

"Then you mean Linda."

"*Of course.*"

I told him I recognised no 'of course' in the matter. He had only seen her a few times, and there was nothing very remarkable about her, except her voice.

This caused an explosion. "Damn her voice!

I wish she hadn't one. It's just that which has made her chuck me."

He went on, despairingly: "I can tell you, Val, it's perspiring work proposing, when you're mad on a girl. I've wanted to do it for a week, but couldn't screw myself up. After all, what is there in me for a girl like that to care for? I almost choked, and she tried to stop me all the time, which made it ten times harder. If you laugh, I'll strangle you!"

"How could I laugh, Clive, when you are hurt?"

He laid his dear head down on my shoulder and cried a little, just as he used to do as a boy. He always ran to me for comfort. I tried to console him; told him that Linda was just now in revolt against domesticity and didn't want to tie herself up to a home till she had had her fling; that, later on, she would, no doubt, feel differently. He must be patient.

"Who wants a bally home?" he cried irritably. "God knows I don't. We could live in a tent, or a caravan, when I'm on leave. She wouldn't have too much of me, anyway. I told her that. She talked about not being 'fettered,' and being free. Such rot! As if I'd fetter her! She would be as free as air."

I besought him not to worry, but give Linda time, suggesting that she might tire of her operatic training, as many singers did, and not come out at all.

"She won't," he said, gloomily. "Not she.

She isn't that sort of girl. She'll stick it and be a huge success, and marry a fat, greasy tenor. Ugh! I can see the brute."

"Let's hope he won't be so very fat," I murmured soothingly. "And she may get fat too, Clive; they often do."

He laughed and the creases went out of his forehead. Then he drew out his pipe and I knew that the worst was over.

"Why do girls you don't want always hang round your neck, while those you do want turn you down?" he demanded, when the pipe was well alight.

"For the same reason, I suppose, that the men you don't care for always want to marry you, and the men you care for don't."

"But it isn't so bad for girls. They don't have to propose. How should *you* like to be refused?"

It was a question I had never propounded to myself.

"It would be intolerable," I agreed; "but yet, why should it? Isn't life one Great Refusal? We pray continually for what we don't get. And sometimes," I added, after a pause, "we live to be thankful our prayers were not answered."

To divert him I related one of my early passions, when I lay awake all night crying for a middle-aged actor in a travelling company and praying that he might be my husband. "Suppose my pathetic appeal had moved Providence," I concluded, "what would have been my fate?"

"Not all beer and skittles certainly. Little romantic looney, weren't you?" he said, and I could not contradict this statement.

IV

He went back to his ship next morning, leaving me very depressed. It was one of those grey, mournful days that seem to stand still in dread of the future and fear to breathe. There was a mist in the air, making all the trees drip and the house walls damp to the touch. I hate such days, foretaste of sad autumn, and worse than winter, because there is no fire to sit by; it is too warm for a fire.

I had not been back from the station long when José came, and I hailed her with pleasure, thinking she might dispel my blue vapours. But her mood was worse than mine; to use her own words, she had a 'twenty-camel hump,' and confessed that she had come round to heave it off on me.

She proceeded to 'heave,' and I had a trying time. For she had heard—heaven knows how—that Clive had been to the Waltons last night instead of going to see her, and she was deeply affronted. Her unflattering remarks about Clive annoyed me, and still more the way she spoke of Linda, as 'a common little rabbit.' I was silent as long as I could restrain myself, but when José declared that the way Linda had chased Clive was simply

disgusting, my blood was roused, and I contradicted her flatly.

"On the contrary," I said coldly, "Clive has been chasing Linda all the time he has been here, and it is not his fault that he has gone back to his ship without being engaged to her."

I felt rather brutal when I saw the way she winced, and the colour surge up to her eyes.

"You mean——?" Her voice and short laugh were harsh.

"Yes; but it's *his* secret, José, and I ought not to have given it away. It was your injustice to Linda that upset me."

She sat still, struggling with herself. Then she rose.

"I am a beast," she said, discordantly; "and in a vile humour. It's the weather, I think. Forgive me, Val, for the horrid things I've been saying about Clive—and Linda Walton too, since you like her. She's all right, of course, only not my sort, and—one gets rather sick of hearing her praises sung by everybody. Perhaps I'm jealous. There's a greenery yallery streak in me—I've always known that. But if Clive really likes her, I hope he'll get her and be happy. He deserves to be, for he's a nice boy, one of the best. We all like him awfully. Give my love and good wishes to him when you write. Good-bye, old thing. Hope I haven't bored you to extinction with my blues."

I liked her more at that moment than ever before.

It was true, as Clive said, she was a 'good sport,' and had pulled herself together in a way I could not but admire. A typical modern girl; and so is Linda. They go straight for their bull's-eye—hit or miss—and if they miss they will no more faint or cry than a man would.

I feel myself a back number beside them.

CHAPTER XVII

I

SEPTEMBER is passing like a dream—the " season of mists and mellow fruitfulness." Days grow short and evenings long. The red hunter's moon slips from a purple veil and casts a magical glow on the yellowing trees. Hollyhocks and wallflowers are nearly over, but my garden is still gay and sweet. Roses are in their second bloom, more perfect than the first, and snapdragons fill the borders with their lovely shades of pink and yellow, red and orange, deliciously lemon-scented. Weeds riot everywhere. Jolly lets them riot, knowing their race of life is almost run. The first half of the month was serenely calm, and made me think often of Hood's luminous description :

> I saw old Autumn on the misty morn
> Stand shadowless, like Silence listening
> To silence, for no lonely bird would sing
> Into his hollow ear from woods forlorn.

It is the song of birds one misses now, more than the summer blossoms, for the autumn flowers are so opulent and richly hued that the garden seems even more alive and vivid than it does earlier in the year. The robin's gay little ' tweetle-tee ' is

all we hear now, and the starling chapping his beak. All the other bird fun seems to be over. I enjoyed those peaceful weeks; but since the middle of the month we have had gales that get on my nerves and make me want to scream. They hurry the leaves from the trees and moan about the house in a way inexpressibly dreary. Even Sally says they make her feel unked.

Linda has been in London a fortnight and writes letters of rapture. Her master is pleased with her voice and promises her a career, if she will work. She has two lessons a week from him, and other lessons, on sight-reading, calisthenics (with breathing exercises), and elocution from others. She has to begin at eight in the morning and is kept busy all day. Judith writes that she is growing very fond of her, and I think her parents are becoming more resigned to her absence. At first they were very miserable and full of fears for their 'duckling.'

I fly to the Bede House when the wind depresses me badly; an effect it always has upon my spirits. There is ever a warm welcome and cheering companionship to be found there, and time with the Heathers passes quickly. They never evince the slightest desire to talk of themselves, and I have come to the conclusion that that is the secret of good company. The dreariest bores are, not the dull-witted, but those men and women whose interest is entirely centred in their own affairs. You know that, whatever you say to them, they are not listening, but only marking time till they

can pounce in again and hold the conversational field. The Heathers make your interests theirs, and the sole fault I can find with them is that they tend to make egoists of us all. I am ashamed to remember, when I leave them, how much I have played the bore myself! They are, however, drawing me into the village web, in spite of my resistance. I wriggle vainly against their gentle influence, but find myself pledged to take a singing-class at the Girls' Club this winter, and to go and sing to Mrs. Bates, the poor woman whose sufferings Dr. Wakelyn is trying to mitigate, if he cannot cure. The bare thought makes me shudder! To sing in a stuffy cottage, impregnated by the odour of disease and disinfectants, will certainly make me ill. But I could not refuse Felicity. Am I going to develop into the ideal, district-visiting, and Bible-class old maid? It would appear so.

II

I have quarrelled with Dr. Wakelyn and hope I may never see him again. I had been thinking about him a good deal, and when he turned up, one hazy morning, on the edge of October, I was delighted to see him. He found me in the kitchen garden, picking off nasturtium seeds for Sally to pickle as a substitute for capers, and from the look in his eyes I knew that he was pleased as I was to meet again. He was not talkative, however, and our conversation for some time was a patchwork.

It was too cold to sit outside, so we went indoors and sat by the log fire in the hall, while he smoked and I did some sewing. Presently he remarked how nice and homely I looked with a thimble on my finger and a cat at my feet.

"Quite the domestic pet!" I said, laughing; "but don't let it deceive you. I'm not a bit domesticated."

"Is that something to be proud of?" he asked, with a slight frown, and when I did not reply, launched an abrupt question.

"Why aren't you married?"

If I had not felt that we were friends, I should have resented this impertinence, but I didn't feel affronted, only amused, and returned:

"Why should I marry?"

"Why shouldn't you? It is inconceivable that no one has hitherto fallen in love with you, and almost as unlikely that you've never cared for any man."

"Can't you imagine a possible situation," I said, "in which six men fall in love with one woman and the same woman falls in love with six men, and they are all different ones?"

"No woman can fall in love with six men."

"Oh, yes, she can—at different times in her life. Do men only fall in love once?"

He was silent. Then: "The situation you suppose is unlikely. There is a certain attraction that draws one man to one woman, and why should not the woman feel it too?"

"I don't know why. Theoretically she should, and it's a pity she doesn't. But, as a matter of fact, it is quite a common thing for a woman to have six men fall in love with her, not one of whom she can possibly care for, while others whom she *could* care for are not in the least attracted by her."

"I should have thought," he said slowly, after a pause, his words coming with a strange hesitation, "that any man *you* cared for could be made to care for you. I mean that you could exercise a potent attraction and—and, as the novelettes say —bring him to your feet."

I felt a sudden dryness of the lips, but only laughed a little.

"Oh, I was speaking entirely of an abstract case," I said. "Personally I have never, since I came to years of discretion, met the man I could love enough to marry."

"What a pity!"

The commiseration in his tone fired me.

"Why?" I demanded. "Is there nothing but marriage for a woman? Can she have no other career?"

"Good Lord, what a monstrous idea! Of course there are many careers open to women, and will be more and more. But the simplest, most natural, and, I think, the happiest way of serving one's generation, for a woman, is by marriage."

"You will be terribly shocked, I fear, when I tell you that I have not the slightest desire to serve my generation."

He grew very serious. "I can hardly believe that you are content to be a parasite," he said.

"Is there no alternative?"

"None. The useless woman, or man, the non-producer, is simply a parasite on the producers, the useful members of society."

"Do you call the Heathers parasites?"

"The Heathers are the most useful women I know. They simply mother the whole village, and when they are gone their place will not easily be filled. But they are exceptional."

I shrugged my shoulders. "Oh, well, I can't pretend to be exceptional or devoted to good works, like our dear Felicity and Prudence, or like my friend Judy Wills. I am content to be Sir Willoughby Patterne's ideal woman, 'a parasite and a chalice.' Isn't it a lovely word—'chalice'?"

Something blazed out of his eyes.

"Don't be flippant, girl, or I shall have to seize you by main force and drag you through a hospital for incurables."

"You would indeed have to drag me," I said. "Nothing on earth will ever make me enter a hospital. The very thought of one turns me sick."

I saw the light go out of his eyes and his lips tighten. He was very angry.

"I suppose you have never reflected that you may have to go to one some day," he observed frigidly. "Or do you suppose yourself immune from ill-health and disease?"

I shuddered. "Oh, you are horrible!" I exclaimed.

"I think *you* are horrible!" was his quick retort. "Monstrous in your egoism. There are diseases of the soul worse than any of the body."

I felt a sudden rush of blood to my face, a sudden rage in my heart against him, and a frantic desire, at the same time, to justify myself in his eyes.

"You think I am hard-hearted because I don't like to go into hospitals and gloat over the poor wretches there," I cried hotly. "It is just the opposite. I am too sympathetic. I can't bear to see people suffering."

"It is very unpleasant," he said drily, a concentrated scorn in his tone. "But, may I ask what you would do with the sufferers? Put them in a lethal chamber, or ship them off to a leper island, out of sight?"

I felt almost suffocating. His quiet contempt maddened me, but I was determined not to let him triumph. A long breath, a few moments' struggle, and I then answered, with a smile:

"Perhaps that isn't a bad idea. They would probably be grateful. But what would the doctors do then, poor things? Their occupation would be gone."

To this gibe he made no reply, and as soon as it was uttered I felt such shame as I had never felt before in my life. Here was a man devoting his whole life to the alleviation of suffering, and I had

insulted him in defence of my own poor little vanity. What devil prompts us to say what we do not mean, do not think, do not believe, when that thin-skinned creature within us is touched? I bit my lips to keep them steady, and would not look into the earnest eyes fixed upon my face. Perhaps he had a flash of understanding.

"Valentine," he said gently.

I don't know why I did it. From the depths of my heart I was sorry and contrite. Yet I flashed round on him, and spoke savagely.

"I am Valentine to my friends only. Not to those who despise and insult me."

He turned away, without a word, and went out. I flew upstairs to my room and stood, half-choked, by my bed.

"Oh, how I hate him, how I hate myself—and everybody!" I raged, and, throwing myself down, wept till I could weep no more. There is an end of our friendship; for, of course, he will never forgive me.

III

José has been away for a month, and now drops in often to pour out all her adventures. She is a curious blend of the sporting and conventional woman. I think she wants to be married, and her mind is certainly full of love and lovers. When she is not talking of tennis, golf or hunting, she is telling me about some swain who hovers round her, or reading me bits out of amorous letters, or confessing

a secret passion for some man she has met in town. Lately she has taken to reading the most sentimental novels she can find—'juicies' she calls them—and when I recommend one of a better type, she scoffs at it, as 'highbrow' and dull. "I want lots of love-making in a novel," she says, half laughing at herself. "I like to see how they do it in books—so different from real life. And what's the good of reading books like real life? One wants a change. Of course you never meet the lovely men described in novels. Most men are stumpy and commonplace, going a little bald on the top after they're thirty, and with half their teeth stopped. But when you get into a book the hero is handsome as a god, tall and straight as an arrow, strong and brave as a lion; he can shoot and hunt and play all games better than anyone else, and his love-making is all poetic and eloquent. He doesn't merely say: 'Look here, old girl, I'm getting awfully fond of you, don't you know?' but simply carries you away with his fervent language. Give me a book in which there's nobody like anybody I've ever seen in my life and nothing happens as it does in real life. None of your character studies for me. A page of Arnold Bennett will send me to sleep sooner than a sleeping draught."

She amuses me, but I get rather tired of her.

IV

I do a good deal of gardening whenever the weather permits; but October has come in wet and windy, and for days at a time I am held indoors. Yet I have managed to weed my rock garden and the lily-of-the-valley bed, distrusting Jolly's wholesale manner of hoeing, which seems to me to destroy as many flowers as weeds. The hoe is, I verily believe, his fetish. He regards it with a peculiar faith, and is never so happy as when he has it in his hand.

There is much sweeping up of leaves to be done now. A thick carpet of them lies over the garden :

> Leaves, brown, yellow, or grey or red
> And white with the whiteness of the dead.

which, "like troops of ghosts in the dry wind," make such a rustle about me when I am weeding in the dusky autumn afternoons that I sometimes get an eerie feeling of invisible companionship, and am glad to go indoors. I have tried sweeping up leaves, but it is very hard work. Many of them stick to the moist ground and refuse to budge. So I have left that to Jolly, with the hedge-clipping and digging.

He has clipped Adam and Eve most featly, and they have a faint resemblance to monstrous human forms. He is really clever at topiary work, and I gave him an extra half-crown, with my compliments. I think he is really less gloomy than he was when

he first came, not so much a figure of Woe haunting the garden. Is it due to Sally's charms? Sometimes I hear him turning the mangle for her on washing days and actually laughing. His laugh creaks, like the mangle itself, whose crank is a bit rusty, but I can distinguish the human creak from the other. I wonder if she walks out with him on Sunday nights. Strange how two women can live under the same roof and know so little of each other's inner life!

I have gathered the last lavender and laid it on my window-seats to-day. Since it began to bloom, in July, I have cut the spikes regularly, as fast as they grow mauve and spicy, so that there has been a fragrant mist of colour over my grey hedges for nearly three months. Once let it seed, and Nature, having accomplished her purpose, bids it flower no more. It has filled my rooms with aromatic air, and I can well believe that it is 'of a special good use for all the griefs and pains of the Head and Brains . . . as also of the tremblings and Passions of the Heart.' I wonder if chemists still sell lavender lozenges for headache, as they did when I was a child. Sally has agreed to make me a 'cordial electuary' of the crushed pips, according to Culpeper's directions, but she is very sceptical about all these recipes.

I miss Linda, and, to speak truth, the days seem rather long and lonely. Is it because I am not so happy as I was? When one's heart is light one can be alone all day and never want a companion; but

a heavy heart is beset by depressing thoughts. I don't mean that my heart is really so heavy; there is nothing to make it so; but on certain days, the dull, muggy ones, when a drizzling rain falls, life becomes empty and one's interest in everything flags. What is it all for—this reading, and practising and weeding a garden? For myself, to amuse me solely, and for no other end? Dr. Wakelyn seems to have infected me with a microbe of discontent and dissatisfaction. Am I a parasite, as he said, a wretched egoist, indifferent to everything but my own little pleasures? And if so, where do I differ from any ordinary '*fille de joie*'? One begins to understand why single women take to good works. Is it not to escape from themselves? And that leads me back in a circle to my starting-point. Whatever we do, our 'good works' and our pleasures alike, are they not all based on self-gratification?

These are the speculations that haunt my mind on dreary days. And the one way I can escape them is by going round to the Heathers for a dose of optimism. I went there yesterday, and discharged at them certain meditations on the subject of marriage.

"What do you think of the institution of matrimony?" I said. "Is it not a grossly over-rated one? What do people want to get married for? I've come to the conclusion that marriage has to be either a tragedy or a mean sort of compromise."

The sisters looked across at each other, smiling.

"She doesn't think anything of the kind, Fliss," said Prudence; and Felicity replied, "Of course not."

I assured them that I did; that, from all accounts, the romance, the passion flower, dies very soon, and then the prosaic facts so plainly stated in the marriage service obtrude in their native ugliness. Beneath silken raiment the human animal crouches ready to pounce on its victims, and cruel nature lurks behind to enslave the woman and make her suffer horribly.

"Oh, yes," I concluded, "love and marriage are all very fine in theory, the soul of romance, the fount of poetic inspiration; but, when all is said, they are but means to a certain end, carnal and unpleasant to contemplate."

They looked at me with something like pity in their kind eyes, and Felicity said softly:

"I do not see it like that, my dear one. To me the love between man and wife is a very beautiful, very holy thing, composed of devoted and unselfish desires, each for the other and both for their children, when they have them. They are fulfilling a divine law, and are happier than anyone can be who has no such important responsibility, no such great object in life."

I admitted that one marriage in a hundred might be fulfilling a divine law, but asked her what about the other ninety-and-nine couples? Were they not pulling different ways and trying to make the best of a bad job?

"We don't find it so, either among our friends or the village folk," said Prudence.

"Well, they get used to each other, and don't let you hear their wrangling when you visit them."

"Oh, as to wrangling," declared Prudence, "I think nothing of that. It depends on temperament and self-control. Lots of people who love each other squabble continually."

I rose to go. "You two dear people see everything through a rosy mist," I said.

"We hope to see you through it one day, with a delightful husband and sweet children," Felicity observed, smiling.

"Oh, don't, don't!" I cried, holding her by the shoulders and giving her a little shake. "I won't have a husband—I don't want one—or children; I should never bring them up properly. I want to be like you two dear people; to live like you in single blessedness all my days. Men are all very well at a respectable distance, but I don't desire a closer acquaintance. The thought of one ever by my side, interfering, dominating, terrifies me—don't laugh, Prue, it does really. Give me my dream-world, my garden, my books, and music, my own inner kingdom, and I want no more from life. Neither do you, for all you say. You and Felicity are happy as the day is long."

"Of course we are. We ought to be. God has been so good to us."

"But we should have been as happy married—perhaps happier," said Felicity.

" Impossible ! "

" And there was a time when we wished to marry," observed Prudence; " when we quite expected to marry, being ordinary girls, not so clever as you, Val. But you don't mean all you say; you don't want to live a lonely, selfish life; you only think you do. Have you thought what it means? Why, happy as we are, there is an ever-present regret in our hearts that we shall leave no one behind us to enjoy this dear home and garden, and all the treasures we love. Can't you realise how we feel at the thought of strangers—or, at least, people we know very little about—coming here when we are gone, perhaps cutting down all our lovely old trees and selling our household gods, looking upon the place we love as mere property to be disposed of? Think how different it would be to know that those who come after us would cherish all we hold dear for our sake. Can't you understand this, Valentine? "

I could not speak, and my eyes had filled with tears, evoked by something in her voice. But I just nodded, kissed them, and came away.

For once my visit to them was not attended by renewed optimism and good spirits. They had but echoed what was in my own mind, and I felt lonelier than ever. After all, they had each other; I had nobody. Autumn was drawing to winter, and the autumn of my years would soon be upon me. What then?

But my dreary mood was banished by the sight

of a bright fire and the lamp on the table, with my book beside it and two packs of patience cards. Shall it be the Triangle or *Wuthering Heights*, which I am reading again? I chose the book. One's mind is apt to stray over patience, but you can't get away from that impossible Heathcliff and his absurd victims, once under their spell. That is the use of melodrama and the detective story; they paralyse thought and make you forget.

CHAPTER XVIII

I

I MET Dr. Wakelyn this morning, coming out of Mrs. Bates' cottage, and, for a moment, my breath came in gusts. I wished to bow stiffly and pass without speaking, but a sudden rush of gladness at the sight of him held me rooted to the road. And he was pleased to see me. I saw the pleasure leap into his eyes, and we shook hands with a silly smile on both our faces.

"You are the last person I expected to see," was my original observation; and he responded quickly: "And you are the first person I wanted to see. Have you forgiven me? I've forgiven you."

We laughed together, with sudden, joyous foolishness.

"I'm afraid we were very rude to one another," I said; "but, as the boys say, you began with me first."

"Did I really? I am a churl."

"And I'm a "—I paused for a word—"a shrew."

"Anything but that. Say a playful kitten with little claws that innocently hurt."

"A useless creature?"

" I suppose all beautiful things have a use of their own," he said, with a curious side glance.

" That is a concession from you." There was a pause. Then I asked, turning my head to the cottage out of which he had come, " How is she this morning? "

His face changed. " No better. It is only a matter of alleviation now, poor soul. It was too late to try, and yet I hoped—I am always incurably hopeful. But I fear the end is near. She tells me you have been singing to her, and it was a great pleasure. Not to you, though, I'm afraid."

" Oh, I—didn't mind, after the first ten minutes. It was to please Felicity, you know; not a virtuous impulse on my part, as you might suppose. That is, if you give me credit for any virtuous impulses."

He took no notice of this challenge, but merely observed : " I am sure it must have been distasteful to you."

" Yes," I said, " it was, *very*—the going; but afterwards I was glad. It gave me such a nice feeling inside."

He laughed. " Ah, that nice feeling—how do you account for it? "

" I don't try. It might confuse some of my cherished theories. Are you staying long? "

" I am going back to-night. But I may run down again soon. Are you going away anywhere, or staying at home this autumn? "

" I expect to go nowhere before Christmas. I've had enough of wandering."

We talked a few minutes and went our ways.

" He is a great dear," I said to myself, " and one can't help liking him—even when one wants to hate him. But I pity the woman he marries. She will hardly call her soul her own. The best woman for him would be a colourless nonentity that he could paint and mould to his taste. She might like it. Some women do."

Then I fell to thinking of what Felicity and Prudence had said; how they had expected to marry and wished to marry. Matrimony had evidently no terrors for them. And yet they were not ' quite ordinary girls,' as Prudence had declared; they could never have been commonplace. What is the matter with me that I have no natural inclination to be wed? And there is Linda too, absorbed in her dreams and her career. Are we freaks, or only a consistent product of our time; and are there many of us? Will the pendulum swing round again? Or are we moving to a new scheme of things —something on the lines of the honey-bee community? I have been reading Maeterlinck's *Vie des Abeilles*, and it has laid some hold upon my mind. But if there's nothing ahead of us but social service, we had better remain the old ' parasite and chalice ' of man's fancy.

II

I cannot think what has become of Amyas. When I try to evoke him now he seems nowhere in space, as if he had gone back to the land of dreams and

shadows. In his place a very real, very insistent personality appears, whose face I can always see and whose voice I can always hear. "The gods arrive when half-gods go." And what happens when gods arrive? One thinks of the old myths, of Danae and the rest. Can a nymph resist a god, even in these prosaic days?

Letters from Linda are teaching me the world of difference that lies between the amateur and the professional. When one stands up as an amateur one's efforts are measured against other amateurs. When one faces an audience as a professional one challenges comparison with other professionals, and has to hold one's own against that fiercely fighting phalanx singing for bread and cheese! Linda is discovering this. "I am so tired at night that I fall asleep as soon as my head touches the pillow," she writes. "Every morning I start practising at eight—and you don't know the funny kind of exercises I have to do—breathing, rolling r's, singing on my toes with my arms up, etc. I find I've got to learn to speak! I thought I could talk fast enough, and sing a little. But it was all wrong—all except what you taught me. It was a shock to be told I breathed like broken bellows and my voice was woolly and spongy and squawky and wobbly and sticky and throaty and cat-like and cow-like. Once, when I thought I'd really got a good tone, he hurled the word—'*putrid!*' at me. Yesterday he said a peahen could produce a better sound. When he wants to be particularly nasty, he says I

remind him of the Vicar's daughter at a village concert. He seems to expect that to wither me up; but it always makes me laugh."

She does not appear to mind these insults, and says it is all very exciting, like a "sort of game, where you're trying to hit something and nearly always miss. The only encouragement I get is when he nods." She is hearing good music, which enchants her.

Lucky Linda, to have found her moon pearl so early in life! Shall I ever find mine, I wonder?

III

This morning It came. I found it by my plate when I came down to breakfast, in a large square envelope, directed in a small hand. Such a very insignificant thing to cause such a monstrous cataclysm in my life. For I do not believe any woman has ever been so powerfully affected by an offer of marriage.

In the first place, I did not want it and resented it. In the second place, I wanted it intensely and loved it. In the third place, it was not the kind of letter my fancy craved, being far too calm and matter-of-fact. In the fourth, it was exactly what I liked, original, arresting and altogether dominating. The result of all this complexity was that it shook me to my very soul with a storm of doubts and longings.

"I find you have taken possession of me," he wrote, "and consequently I want to take possession of you, in a sense that I hope you will properly understand. For I do not believe one person can ever belong to another. I cannot promise to make you happy, or assure myself that you will make me happy. All I can be sure of is that without you I am lost and restless, and that I think of you too much for the proper conduct of my work. Like the young woman in the American poem, I realise that the only way to get rid of you, as a disturbing influence, is to marry you! But from your point of view, I can urge nothing; no reason why you should care for me or be my wife. I can only throw myself on the remote chance that you may like me well enough to risk the future with me. It is safe to say that no man could know you better than I do, or love you more. Whether you care for me or not, I shall never care for any other woman, or ask any other to be my wife. Yours faithfully, RICHARD WAKELYN."

A wave of emotion engulfed me, and I found myself saying, over and over again: "I love him—of course I love him," and this was followed by a cold douche of doubt, as I asked myself why. How can I love him when he is so utterly unlike my ideal, my Amyas? I am sure he has an odious temper and a domineering will. He would expect me to give in to him on every subject. He is not handsome—here I pause. Is he? There is something

about his thin face and compelling eyes that I feel sure most women would admire immensely. Do I? But no—he is not really a handsome man, and certainly not young. He must be at least ten years older than I am. There is grey in his hair, and he may go bald. I should hate to be married to a bald head. Why do men let themselves go bald? I wouldn't, if I were a man.

I love him—of course I love him. I should love him if there were not a hair on his dear head. But how could I live in London? How could I give up my Shepherd's Delight and my darling garden for a murky, petrol-smelling street, a look-out upon nothing but bricks and mortar? Could I make such a sacrifice even for a man I adore? I suppose so. I suppose we all believe, in our hearts, that when a great devastating passion swoops upon us we are like the lamb in the eagle's clutch, carried away against our will. But do I care for Richard Wakelyn like that? I think not. Am I capable of that great passion? Oh, no; or I could not reason about it. My feeling for him is a different kind of love, tame and tepid in comparison; not strong enough to marry on. So I argued with myself.

I roamed about the garden and the sodden woods, shaken, unsettled, alternately elated and depressed. It rained all day yesterday, and the black and yellow leaves were slippery under my feet. I walked to that spot in the riding of the wood where Richard Wakelyn and I had sat together under a tree,

talking about Jefferies and the farm labourer. How many interests we had in common—books, music, love of nature! But then there were so many points of disagreement. I believed in individual rights; he in the individual's subservience to the social weal. When I said: "Surely we owe something to ourselves," he asked, "What have we done to be paid for? We didn't make ourselves or anything we own. Others have given us everything, to the very clothes we wear. It seems to me we owe everything to those who came before us, and our duty is to those who come after." I could not argue with him. He is too clever, and has an abominable trick of making one's contentions sound trite and silly. But how could one marry a man like that? He might take it into his head to sacrifice his wife to the common weal!

Besides, I am happy as I am, and it would be madness to plunge into matrimony just because—well, because I love him, if I *do* love him. He would expect me to be orthodox in domesticity: to spend my thoughts on his household, to be a model wife. And mother—for of course he would expect babies. Men always want babies, but it is a foolish fallacy that all women do. The average man, I am convinced, is fonder of children than the average woman. No wonder. He does not have the agony and trouble of them.

I am fond enough of children. They are as deliciously amusing as kittens and puppies. But the constant anxiety and responsibility of them would,

I am sure, drive me crazy. There are born mothers, and I admire them profoundly. But I do not happen to be one of them, and we are as God made us. I am a physical coward, to begin with, and the whole *modus operandi* of birth revolts me to my very soul. It always seems to me a quite inexcusable lack of fairness on the part of the Almighty, to have thrown such a terrible burden on one half of humanity.

When I start thinking thus, indignation masters me. I walked quickly, to try and escape from this nightmare of thought, and indeed it was time to return, for the dusk had fallen and there were strange shadows about me. The smell of corruption from decaying vegetation filled the damp air. I hurried through the riding to the gate.

In the shadow of the hedge, outside the gate, a young man and girl were standing, very close together, very silent and absorbed. I started and shivered. At another moment the sight of happy lovers would have stirred a sense of time-honoured romance and appealed to my fancy; but coming upon my perverse mood it roused a kind of nausea. No—I would never be married. I swore to myself. My romance should be only spiritual, untainted of earth.

I wrote my letter of refusal that night, after many attempts, couching it in as much courtesy as I could express; for I remembered Clive's words: "How should you like to be refused?" I told Dr. Wakelyn that I had no desire to marry and was not fitted to be a wife. The mere thought of it

appalled me. And when at last it was written, and the envelope sealed, I drew a breath of relief.

But I cried to my pillow through the night. "I love him, oh, I do love him," and my eyes were sore with many tears. Was there ever such patchwork? If only I could be all one piece!

CHAPTER XIX

I

VILLAGE life is enchanting in the spring and summer; even in autumn it has delights; but the dull days and long nights of winter are certainly depressing. I have as many resources as most people, but have found myself with what José calls "a twenty-camel hump" during the interminable evenings alone lately. The solitude I have so much enjoyed has become almost unendurable now—and I long for a companion. I sit alone by my fire, listening to the beat of rain or sleet on the window-panes, while, crying through the keyholes and moaning down the chimney, the wind, like a banshee, haunts the ancient house with dreary forebodings. The passing of an occasional vehicle, the bark of a distant dog or eerie cries of the little brown owl are the only other sounds I hear.

The garden is all black and sodden; even the chrysanthemums that gladdened it have fallen before the sullen rains and bitter winds of November. A few linger in my little greenhouse and in the corner of the conservatory, but they will soon be over, and the bulbs I have planted in moss fibre will not flower yet. How I hate the world without

flowers! Next year I will have a better stove in the conservatory, and fill it with winter blooming things. 'A house full of books and a garden of flowers' is not enough. One must have a greenhouse full of flowers too. I have been improvident. I did not realise how flowerless winter can be in the country. In town you can always buy them.

II

I find myself ridiculously pleased to be invited to a dance or dinner-party. The Stacys had a dinner one night, and the Heathers another. Mrs. Walton asked me to supper when Linda came down for a week-end, and I enjoyed the pleasant family party, with its games and laughter. And last night, at José's dance, I had quite a good time. *He* was not there, of course, to spoil my pleasure, and I pretended to be 'sweet and twenty' with some success. Standing as I do, "with reluctant feet," where middle age and girlhood meet, I was a little nervous lest the swains of the countryside should ignore me, especially as I know so few of them. Twenty-nine is an awful age for a woman, being on the eve of thirty, which we all dread. I am sure one never feels so old again! But the sporting youths of José's circle seemed to be attracted by such mature charms as I can boast, and my frock really was a dream. I went to the county town for it, and, by luck, hit on a clever

dressmaker. Amber mist and moonlight in crêpe-de-Chine and chiffon, it might have veiled a goddess, and it made me feel almost like one; which is, after all, the main thing in dressing oneself. Charm depends so largely on self-confidence, and a disappointing gown can depress a woman till she feels as if all her sawdust has run out!

How I love dancing! There are some dance tunes, of strong rhythm, that would, I am sure, make me rise from my deathbed to dance, like the woman in Sibelius's *Valse Triste*. And the new 'ragtime' rhythms are irresistible. They make a Bacchante of me!

I sat out the best part of a waltz with Mr. Wakelyn, to save him from apoplexy. For he waltzed, as he sang, with extreme energy, grabbing me round the waist and flinging me violently round, in each revolution, as if he feared that I had not the use of my legs. I wonder why some men dance like that, never trusting their partners to do a fair share of the action. As he became redder and redder, more breathless and more breathless, I suggested sitting out the rest of the dance, and his relief was obvious.

As soon as he had regained breath, he began to talk about his brother. At first I took this to be a mere conversational subject, but presently I realised that he was speaking with a purpose. His eyes were watching me all the time he told me about Dick's first love affair with a girl in the

neighbourhood, and how soon it passed—mere calf-love, don't you know? And how Dick had never cared for anyone since then; how he was not 'a woman's man,' but the best fellow in the world, and one any girl might be proud of as a lover or husband. "He seems a cold, indifferent sort of card," the Squire concluded, "and of course he is very strong-willed and determined. But I assure you, Miss Val—and I know him better than anyone—that the right woman, by which I mean one he cared for, could twist him round her little finger."

The observant expression in his eyes turned to a penetrating one, challenging a denial from me. I could have laughed, but resisted the temptation, though I knew that I had reddened under his gaze.

"I can believe all you say," was my reply, as I tried to look politely indifferent.

"The woman who gets him for a husband," he went on, emphatically, "will be a *very* lucky woman."

"No doubt."

"Then why"—he paused, and I noticed a twinkle in his blue eyes—"why doesn't she?"

"Why doesn't she—what?"

"Get him—snap him up before she loses him."

"How should I know? It is incomprehensible."

We looked at each other. Then he burst into one of his hearty laughs.

"Oh, you women, you women! What sphinxes

you are!" he cried. "I'm hanged if I ever understood one yet."

"Because you've never tried to put yourself in a woman's place and feel as she feels," I suggested. "If you did—if you could—she would be as transparent to you as—as a greenhouse. You would see all her actions growing out of their natural roots, like plants. Surely you believe there's a reason for everything?"

The Squire laughed again. "You're too clever for me," he said. "I shouldn't like to be your husband, charming as you are, for I'm sure you would squash me flat if I ventured to disagree with you. You need a really brainy man to dress you down, miss. I know one who would keep you in your proper place."

"So do I"—it was my turn to laugh now—"if he once had the power over me."

Again we looked straight at each other. Then he whistled softly.

"Oh, that's it, is it? You're afraid, are you?" and before I could deny this my next partner whisked me off.

III

Now what could have made the Squire talk like that? I could not believe that his brother had told him what had passed between us. They are the best of friends, but I am convinced that no man over thirty confides his love affairs to others

—except in novels. And I am sometimes inclined to think that the writing man is a species apart, who does not really know or understand all the rest. One finds such abnormal men in men's books! In one I read the other day by a famous writer, a strong, taciturn man poured out all his passionate love of a woman into the ears of one who was not even particularly sympathetic. But the men one meets every day, men like my father and brothers (with the exception of Clive, who is only a boy), do not indulge in such weak outpourings of emotion, and I am quite sure Richard Wakelyn would not. I do not think the Squire would either, for all his boyishness and natural candour.

He knows something. How much, I wonder? And how did he find out? I love the dear man. He would make a delightful husband, I am sure. One could be happier with him than with the other. Of course he would go to sleep after dinner when one played or sang to him, which would be rather trying, especially if he snored. But I suppose one can get used to anything—even a door-mat husband. He would be better, anyhow, than a husband who dressed one down.

How would it feel to be 'dressed down'?

IV

To-morrow I go to stay with George over Christmas. I feel ridiculously excited, like a child going

home for the holidays. The thought of being in the old house again, with all the dear ones, makes me wild with delight. If only Clive could be there, and not far away in southern seas! I am shutting up the house, and Sally is going to stay with Mabel's mother. She prefers it to visiting her own people, at which I am surprised. It may be a sense of duty, as she avers; her contention being that someone ought to keep the house warmed and aired, as the weather is so rainy. She will come in every day, open windows and light fires according to discretion.

As José declares, I am 'full of beans'; have written two new songs this last week. Here are two stanzas from one of them.

Youth and Love go hand in hand
Through the green and flowery land;
Youth with silver lilies crowned,
Love's white brow with roses bound.
Blossoms many, fresh and sweet,
Spring about their dancing feet,
Mated by a law supreme,
Living in a golden dream.

. . . . .

Ah, we all have seen them pass,
Lightly treading o'er the grass,
Known the magic of their spell,
Magic that no tongue can tell.
Now on us the shadows fall,
Memory only can recall
Youth and Love, so fresh and gay,
Dancing down the primrose way.

Surely that ought to be commonplace and sentimental enough to please my dear, unexacting public. And I've captured a lilting, swinging tune, suggesting the dance of Love and Youth down the primrose way, bless them!

If I could afford to choose my lyrics where my own taste lies, instead of pleasing the general public, I would set some of the quaint songs from *A Handfull of Pleasant Delites:* "The Faithfull Vow of Two Constant Lovers," or "Fain would I have a Pretie Thing to give unto my Ladie," but the failure of the spinet song has warned me off that ground. These old love-songs have for me a perennial enchantment. I read them over and over again, with the same delight, especially "The New Courtly Sonet of My Lady Greensleeves." It is full of pictures. Take, for instance, the lines:

> For every morning when thou rose
> I sent the dainties orderly,
> To cheere thy stomack from all woes,
> And yet thou would'st not love me.

One can see the serving-man 'all clothed in green' at my lady's door, all smirks, and Greensleeves herself in bed languidly cheering her 'stomack' with the dainties. What a baggage she was, to take all the jewels and 'peticotes' and crimson stockings and golden girdles with 'pearls bedeckèd sumptuously,' and smocks of silk and kerchers and gowns, with a horse to ride and men to wait on her, and then to cast him off 'discourteously'! Was

he an ill-favoured old rake, and was she sick to death of him and his presents? Or was she, like me, incapable of passion? I feel that she was a real woman and loved beautiful things, as I do. What became of her? What becomes of the Greensleeves who are ever taking and never giving? They must be very horrible when they are old. I hope I am not one of them.

CHAPTER XX

I

It is nice to be back again in Shepherd's Delight, after a happy fortnight with George and family. They were so kind and the children are darlings, especially the fat little chuckling baby, with his round face, alert eyes and pink toes. Why do babies always look as if they know everything and won't tell? John is a perfect sage, a mysterious sage. All the wisdom of the ancients lies in his dark eyes, and his smile is full of inscrutable humour. He gazes in one's face, and then, suddenly, appears to see some hidden jest and doubles up with laughter. What is the joke, I wonder?

But although I love the babies, they exhaust me, and I could not do with them for long. I don't want them for my own, as I suppose a womanly woman should. The worry and responsibility of them would, I am sure, reduce me to a shadow! Those bumps in the nursery used to stop my heart-beats. In my mind's eye I saw little Gilbert's head broken by a fall from the rocking-horse. Half a dozen times a day I rushed upstairs in a panic, only to find the bump and screams of no important significance, and nurse placidly smiling over them. I have come to the conclusion that it

needs a very calm, cool, phlegmatic woman to be a mother.

We had a Christmas tree and great fun. I went to several dances, and was warmly welcomed by old friends. One, Charlie Slade, who fell in love with me when he was a lanky boy of sixteen and I was twenty-two, has grown into a very handsome man, in the Arcadian Shepherd style; fine, manly and dull of wit. He dances well, and it was pleasant to hear his declaration of a constant affection. He used to make me an offer of marriage periodically, and has evidently not quite broken himself of that habit, though he took my refusal again with philosophic calm; not with the tears and despair of yore. Although he swears he has remained unwed for my sake, I shrewdly suspect that he is more enamoured of his freedom than of any maid.

When we were sitting out, far up the stairs in a country house, he suddenly threw his arms round me and kissed me on the mouth, which made me ferociously angry. Apart from the indignity of being treated as a barmaid or chorus girl, there is nothing I detest so much as crude sensation, and a man's kiss is horribly perturbing. It stirs up something one desires to ignore, under-currents beneath the serene and limpid sea of civilisation. But I could not explain this to Charlie, even had I wished. He would only have thought me quite mad. So I told him he was an ill-mannered lout and left him. He could understand that, though I am not sure that he was properly humiliated.

II

I spent a few days in London with Judith on my way home, and it depressed me, as it always does. The people do not look happy, and the sight of the ogling women on the pavements at night sickens me infinitely. I suppose Londoners get used to these sights, but I cannot. They are walking horrors one can forget in the country. In the East, we are told, the beggars expose their sores, but we, of the West, are supposed to hide ours. As if those we show were not more revolting to those who see them! Judith says the more they are shown, the better chance of curing them, but I wonder! Anyhow, they help to spoil London for me.

Linda's voice has developed wonderfully. Her tone has deepened and she sings with greater ease. The exercise of her abdominal muscles has already made her a little broader at the waist, and one can foresee the prima donna already in her throat and chest. We went to the opera together, and I noticed that she had learned to *hear* as well as sing. Nothing escaped her.

Judith invited Dr. Wakelyn to dine one night, but he declined. I do not know whether I was relieved or disappointed. Sometimes I long to see him again, to hear his voice and feel the strong grip of his hand. Then again I am afraid, and feel that I would run away rather than cross his path. In his letter to Judy he asked whether I

would care to go with her over his hospital. I detected a gibe in the invitation and, to Judy's astonishment, said I would go. I knew he expected a refusal, and was resolved he should not form cut-and-dried conclusions about Valentine Prescott.

With a sick loathing I went to the terrible place, screwing my courage to endure all I saw without flinching, or betraying the least emotion. He showed no surprise at my appearance, but gave us both a very warm welcome. There was a light in his eyes that made my heart beat very fast, and, quite suddenly, I found a lump in my throat and my eyes smarting. To recover my equilibrium I spoke flippantly, and have regretted it ever since.

"I have come to see your show," I said, with a nervous, silly laugh. "I'm sure it will be a good discipline for a butterfly to see the ants at work."

He made no reply, but turned to Judith and began talking of a case in which she was interested. And the butterfly felt like a worm!

I bore it all with stoicism: the dreadful wards with their lines of suffering bodies; the operating theatre with its ghastly suggestions; the wonderful appliances and instruments; the dreadful museums; the X-ray theatre, interesting and mysterious. I could have lingered there some time, trying to understand the incomprehensible array of knobs and dials. It makes a powerful appeal to the imagination, this radium force, terrific but fascinating and full of suggestion.

At last the ordeal was over—just in time, I felt,

to prevent my turning into marble! For the effort required to prevent myself from sobbing or screaming seemed to paralyse my muscles. The atmosphere of it all was awful. Pain—pain everywhere, with death hovering near. All that illness, those multiple forms of disease, brought under one roof, oppressed me horribly. I knew it was wrong; that I should, instead, have rejoiced in the magnificent fight for health that was going on; in the heroic men and women who were spending their lives in combating a common foe. I realised all this, and it made me feel distressingly small and humble; but I hated the sight of it. I have never wanted to see a battlefield!

"Well, it wasn't so bad, after all, was it?" Dr. Wakelyn said, at parting, with that shine in his eyes and smile on his lips that I adore. But I could not smile—I, the onlooker.

"So bad," I replied, "that I think it will haunt me all the rest of my life. Oh, how *can* you bear it?"

And then, for the first time, tears came into my eyes, and the last words were choked and blurred.

His kind eyes rested a moment on my face and then were turned away. There was no smile on his lips as he said, sadly:

"I suppose I am used to it."

III

Oh, how splendid he is, and how I worship him! A true knight errant, a million times nobler than all those foolish heroes of the past, who slashed about with swords, killing their fellow-men, chiefly for absurd reasons. For one damsel in distress that a Perseus rescued, my hero saves hundreds from a dreadful fate.

And he thinks I am indifferent to him. He must always think so, since I can never marry him. I could not live in that awful London, full of grim, stalking ghosts; the home of demoniac pleasure and bitter suffering; disease and vice; dirt and noise. As in *The Ballad of True Wisdom*, my humble petition I put up every day "for a house full of books and a garden of flowers." One can have the books in town, but the garden—who that has ever known a garden like mine would give it up for anything a city can offer?

But I knew Richard Wakelyn would not give up his old hospital and his work for any garden, or any woman, in the world. I should despise him if he did. And how could we two be happy together when we have no essential love and interest in common? No. We must remain apart; he in his hospital, I in my garden. And we shall go on our respective ways till he forgets me. Perhaps he will marry Judith eventually. I must face that possibility.

IV

February gold and silver have begun to shine in my borders—gold cups of crocus, silver bells of snowdrop among the little darling blue stars of hepatica, first to arrive and last to go. The elms at the bottom of the garden delight my eyes when the hazy sunlight throws them against a milky blue sky, for they are clothed in a vesture of little red buds only visible when the light is strong enough to paint them on a pale background. Trees are even lovelier without their foliage than with it sometimes, except at the magic time when they begin to flush with pale emerald. Perhaps the most beautiful sight in the world is a winter tree robed in hoar frost; the silver birch, for example. It comes straight out of fairyland, or the Celestial City—so exquisite that one feels inclined to kneel and pray before it!

I love Bridge's poem about the palm willow, now beginning to hang out her pale tassels.

> The woodland willow stands, a lonely bush
> Of nebulous gold;
> There the Spring-goddess cowers in faint attire
> Of frightened fire.

For the willows are very lovely in the dark woods just now, and their beauty may so easily pass unregarded. One may surely be as grateful to a poet who makes us see lovely things as to a painter who shows them on canvas.

I have heard the Shepherd's pipe on several nights lately, and it gets on my nerves. All day the refrain runs through my head irritatingly, and I find myself singing :

> Before I fell in love, O,
> Every month was May,

at my work in the garden, over my books and even during meals. I tried to exorcise the goblin thing one day by singing the whole song through at my spinet, but to no effect; the tune haunted me worse than ever. I am coming to hate the very word 'love,' as an interference with the serener joys of life. For I, like the poor Shepherd, found 'every month was May' before—— What nonsense! As if I were going to admit having fallen in love! The Green Lady is on her way, and when she arrives how happy shall I be, among my flowers.

V

I had a shock to-day, when Sally asked me suddenly, as she was clearing away my dinner things, whether I could manage without her in the near future.

"Mabel," she said, "could do for you well enough, with me to help her sometimes, as she knows your ways now."

I felt a chill and almost gasped.

"What! Do you want to leave me, Sally?" I

asked reproachfully. "I hoped you were happy here."

"Well—you see—it's like this, Miss——" She fidgeted with the tablecloth and grew very red: "I'm been thinking as I should like a little—Home of me own now, not being so young as I was."

I looked at her sternly. "Jolly?" I said; and she grew even redder.

"Well, yes, Miss Val, since you put it like that. It *is* Jolly. He's very lonesome of nights, and I've been darning his socks and pants for him quite a while now. I dunno how it is, but I begin to feel as I should like to darn 'em officiously, as you may call it, and not suptitiously."

"I quite understand. You covet the right to mend his socks and pants before the whole village, and not have to push them in the dresser drawer when Mabel's about."

"I never done that. Mabel she knows all about it; in fact, she egged Timothy on. He was afraid to put the question—so he says—till Mabel told him he was a great cuckoo and I was only waiting to be asked."

"Then I wish Mabel had minded her own business, Sally, for I don't want to lose you. And how long would she stay with me, I wonder? I suppose she has a boy of her own?"

"Oh, yes, Miss; she always has one, but he isn't always the same," said Sally, consolingly. "Don't you worry about her. She's too cock-wettish to settle down yet. And I shall come and

char for you, and see as she does her duty by you, never fear."

I made one last appeal.

"Do you really think you can be happy with Jolly?" I asked. "He's a very morbid and depressing person, and he hasn't the best temper in the world."

"Oh, I know all that, Miss. I ain't going into it with me eyes shut," she answered cheerfully. "He'll be as cantankerous as an old tomcat at times, but I shall just sit tight, feed him well and wait till the fit's over. There's always sommat with a man, as my mother used to say, and if it ain't one thing, it's another. I'd sooner have the cantankerousness than drink, and Jolly don't drink. He's saved a tidy bit through that, and his cottage might be made quite nice, with a woman to look after it properly."

"But do you love him, Sally?" I asked point-blank. She laughed and looked away. I had never noticed before what a comely face she had.

"Well, I dunno," she said; "Love's such a funny thing, ain't it? You never know where it will have you. If anyone had told me I'd ever set up with a grumpy old thing like Jolly, I'd have laughed at 'em. But he has—sort of crept into me Heart, being so lonesome and all, with nobody to do for him; and—well, I don't know if I love him as they do in books, but I want to be with him always, day and night. That's how it is with me."

It seemed a sufficient reason for getting married,

after all; at any rate for a woman like Sally, who wants to mother somebody, even if only "a grumpy old thing."

Her words echoed through my mind several times that evening: "I want to be with him day and night." And I understood her so well. I knew that longing. I could even appreciate the pleasure of darning certain socks and pants! The idea made me laugh at myself contemptuously, yet it thrilled me through and through.

But what shall I do without Sally?

VI

Felicity and Prudence were delighted to hear of the match. "Dear Sally, I do hope she will be happy. Jolly is not a bad sort at heart," said Prudence. "We must give them a nice present, Fliss. What shall it be?"

They began to discuss their wedding gift, but I broke in.

"You don't seem to think of me," I observed ruefully, "left in the lurch, with only that harum-scarum Mabel in the house. And she will always be wanting to go out of it! Why should that miserable old Jolly purloin my treasure?"

"It may be all for the best in the end," said Felicity, with a side glance full of fun; "the greatest good of the greatest number, you know, Valentine. At present Jolly is lonely in his cottage and Sally is lonely in her kitchen; you are often lonely and

probably somebody else is very lonely too—somebody who could make you happy and whom you——"

Here I interrupted sternly. "Who says I am often lonely? Don't you know I love being alone, and thank my lucky stars continually that I have no one to disturb my thoughts or interfere with my actions? I have the best of companionship in my books and music, to say nothing of Pomander, who is always affectionate and agreeable. Besides, haven't I you two dear people to come to when I am tired of myself? What more can a woman want?"

They looked at each other and laughed low. Then Felicity quoted softly, as she had quoted before:

> We that acquaint ourselves with every zone,
> And cross both tropics and behold both poles,
> When we come home are to ourselves unknown
> And unacquainted still with our own souls.

I protested. "You are always accusing me of not knowing myself," I said, "but I do. I have quite an intimate acquaintance with my own soul, Felice, and assure you that I am quite satisfied with my present lot. I want no other."

"Dearest Valentine, I am sure you think so," was her equivocal reply. And with that I had to be content.

CHAPTER XXI

I

Only a week since then, a bare week, and it seems as if a lifetime had passed. How right Felicity was, and how true the words she quoted! Hideously true. Why are we 'to ourselves unknown'? Why does the revelation of one's naked soul come only in the shock of anguish?

I am nearly mad with the pain of it. And why? I thought the man was nothing to me. I told him so, as courteously as I could. And yet, when I met José in the village this morning, hurrying with red eyes to the post office, and she told me that Richard Wakelyn was dying, something seemed to strike right through my head and heart with a physical shock that stunned me, and, for a few moments, I could see nothing.

"Uncle Dick is horribly ill—I'm afraid he's dying," she said, and rushed on. I stood swaying, and all the past and future closed about me with suffocating force. I do not know how I got home, for the road heaved in front of my feet more than once and the horizon wavered strangely. There was a pain in my head as if a bullet had gone through it. I had to lie down before I could breathe properly.

Sally found me and was alarmed; gave me wine and fussed over me, till I had to pretend I was all right again. All right! And *he* is dying! I don't want to be well—I don't want to live without him—I want to be with him, day and night—I want to darn his socks and pants—I want his children—I want him here—and now—and always! I have always wanted him, from the first moment his eyes met mine, and only now I know it. Oh, the fool, the blind, egregious, unmitigated fool I have been, to deceive myself and throw away my happiness—my future—for a dream! Was there ever such a miserable fool in all the world?

I could not rest; I could not even sit still. I could not work, or eat, or read, or think. The house was hateful to me; the garden a desert. Sometimes I had a fit of laughing at my own absurdity, and assured myself that it would pass, this ridiculous obsession, leaving me sane and mistress of myself once more. But I knew all the time that it would not pass, and that I never could be as I had been. Knew, moreover, that I never had been indifferent to Richard Wakelyn, never for one moment. He was my man and my soul recognised his dominion. It was only the shrinking, posing underself we make of ourselves that refused to accept what Fate had decreed. There's a song of Tchaikowsky's I sing sometimes; a minor, tragic song that haunts me now, though I remember but two lines of it. "Ah, love that

came too late! Ah, love that might have been." Might have been! It chokes me.

Dying! I could not bear it. The hours crawled by; a month passed in that afternoon. At five o'clock I went out and sent a telegram to his hospital. For I felt that a night of suspense would kill me.

"Please wire at once how Dr. Wakelyn is. Very anxious. Reply paid. Valentine Prescott, Shepherd's Delight, Woodside, Meadborough." I wrote with a hand that trembled. And I did not care that the postmistress saw my white face and swollen eyes. She spoke of Dr. Wakelyn's illness—influenza, she had heard—of the Squire's being called to him and her hope that he would recover. I seemed to hear her voice in a dream, and noted vaguely that she stared at me. My smile must have been a funny thing. It made my lips ache!

I went back and paced about the garden in the dark. It had been fine all day, but was now drizzling with rain. When Sally, grown anxious, came out and called to me, I could bear myself and my agony no longer.

"Don't ask me to eat. Don't speak to me. Let me alone, Sally, for the love of God! Can't you see what is the matter with me? Haven't you heard of—Dr. Wakelyn's illness?" I cried piteously.

"Oh, my dear Miss Val, Miss Val! Then you

do love him," she whispered, laying her hand on my arm, and bringing her kind face so near that it melted all barriers between us. I laid my head on her broad shoulder and cried as helplessly as a child.

II

I thought the reply to my telegram would never come, and, as eight o'clock approached, I was in an agony of fear lest it should arrive too late for delivery. I made up my mind to storm the post office, if this happened. But it did not. At ten minutes to eight the red-and-black bicycle appeared at my front gate, and Sally opened the door before the boy had reached it.

But I dared not open the orange envelope. It seemed to contain my life, which might be spilt out upon the floor if—— I asked myself if, after all, suspense might not have been better than the truth. But Sally, seeing how it was with me, gently took the telegram from my nerveless fingers and opened it, taking it near the lamp to read.

"Better. No immediate cause for anxiety. Edward Wakelyn," she read, and then laughed her croaky laugh, full of feeling.

"So that's all right. You'll sleep now, Miss Val. I'll get your supper quick," she added, giving the piece of pink paper into my hands. I read it through tears, gloating over every word. Yes, I shall sleep now, if the pain in my head will let me,

the pain of my heart being eased. "No immediate cause for anxiety." Thank God!

III

I did sleep, the sleep of utter exhaustion. Sally brought me a cup of tea when I awoke—I don't know how many times she had put her kind head into the room to see if I were ready for it. The face in my glass made me laugh; it was so ugly—so aged. But my hair had not grown white in a single night, as I had almost expected it would. All day I was restless and unable to do anything. The letter I hoped for did not arrive, and my fears began to raise their grisly heads again. Surely the Squire would have written to me if the improvement in his brother's health had been maintained. Sally was very good to me, chattering of everything under the sun, and telling me of all the miraculous cures she had known. But the hours drawled by with maddening slowness, and I dared not go far from the house lest I should miss any news. I thought José might call, but she did not, and I dared not go round to the Hall. She might have had bad news!

A dozen times or more did my dear Sally assure me, with the air of stating a new and surprising truth, that "no news is good news," but it did not afford me much comfort. There was a beast in the jungle ready to spring out upon me and fasten its fangs in my heart. Every step seemed

its herald. My ears have always been sensitive; now the least sound made me start. I heard the people who passed my gate approaching from far off and held my breath till their footsteps had gone by. The clanging back door bell, rung by butcher and baker, made me gasp and shiver.

Other fears assailed my mind. Suppose Richard Wakelyn, stung by my insolence and pretended indifference, had ceased to care for me. Suppose his love had been one of those brief spells of passion that possess a man for a time and pass. One hears constantly of such evanescent storms in the masculine heart. And we are always told that a lasting love must be founded on respect, that the soil in which alone it can put forth strong roots is that made deep and rich by high esteem. How could Richard Wakelyn respect a creature so volatile and unsteady as I am? Did he not regard me as a mere butterfly? And can a man's love for a butterfly woman last over many months? It was six months since he had asked me to marry him, and I knew how full those six months must have been to him, with all his work and many interests. Had they buried his desire for me fathoms deep beneath their long and busy days? It was more than possible. It was very likely.

I had worked myself into another feverish state of misery when about nine o'clock there was a ring at my bell and Sally admitted the Squire.

He took my hand in a warm clasp and spoke with a suggestion of tenderness in his voice. Per-

haps my fevered, anxious face appealed to his compassion.

"It's all right, my dear," he said. "Dick's going to get well, and you're to go and see him as soon as he is allowed to see anybody."

I tried to speak. It was no good. He sat down on the old oak settle by my fire and talked steadily, while I gritted my teeth and battled with tears —talked about Dick and his illness; the fears of the faculty and his wonderful recuperative powers.

"He is scandalously run down, of course; that's the root of the mischief. He never spares himself, never did, and lately he has been depressed too" —a quick glance at me. "I wonder why doctors never believe in their own cures enough to try them themselves! They'll drug you and knock you off your favourite drinks, but, so far as I can see, when they feel ill, they simply take no notice and let themselves go. Anyhow, that's what Dick did. If I had been seedy, he would have prescribed a change for me and made me take it; but do you think I could get him to take a rest and holiday by coming down here? Not he. Not even for Christmas—the first time for years that he hasn't managed at least a few hours with us at the festive season. But he'll come now all right, I've no doubt."

"Will he?" I faltered, without looking at him. By this time I had gained some control of myself.

"Of course he will. That is, if you ask him. And you will ask him, won't you?"

I nodded.

"Why on earth," the Squire went on, with his boyish smile, "you didn't treat him better, I'm blessed if I know. Didn't you know your own mind?"

"No. That is the kind of fool I am," I replied, tremulously. "I did not know my own mind till I heard he was ill—dying, José said. Then I thought I should die too—or go mad."

My voice had sunk to a whisper. He did not speak for a few moments.

"Jo always colours things. It wasn't as bad as that—though one never knows. He was desperately ill, poor chap—is still. But he'll pull through, they say, if no complications arise. Well, now, if he does, and comes down here, what are you going to say to him? You're not going to play the fool with him again, are you? Because if you do, we shan't be friends. He is more to me than anyone in the world, except Jo. And I tell you plainly, madam, that I don't know any woman good enough for him—not even your charming self."

"You are quite right. I, least of all."

Our eyes met frankly and he smiled into mine as he said:

"Good girl. So long as you realise that, I'm satisfied. All you have to do now is to satisfy him—make him happy."

"Ah, but can I? That is the point. Won't he soon find out all my weaknesses, my vanities and futilities and shallowness and uselessness and——?"

"Don't let that worry you at all," he said, rising. "I'm sure he knows them all quite well already. He could always see through people—much better than I could; and even I can see some of your little weaknesses, my lady. But I don't like you any the less for them, and I'm sure Dick doesn't. So long as he is satisfied with the sum-total, what does it matter if he sees all your little faults and foibles? A man doesn't want to marry a walking model of all the virtues."

"Why does he want to marry her?" I exclaimed foolishly. "What influences a man in his choice?"

His eyes twinkled. "It's beyond mortal understanding," he declared. "But as soon as I saw Dick with you I knew that he felt just as I felt when I first saw my wife: that you had got him in your net and he would never get out. I don't know how it's done—some kind of witchcraft, I suppose. I've felt it about you myself. Of course, the right kind of woman for Dick to marry is one like your friend, Miss Wills. But, lord no—they don't carry the net, and men are 'mostly fools,' you know. Good-night, my dear. I'll let you have all news, and you must write to Dick and tell him what you've told me."

IV

So had I burnt my boats behind me, and, as usual, my vacillating mind swung back into doubts and fears. The other selves made a last effort of rebellion against this tame surrender. Why should the lovesick Valentine, they demanded, give away the Valentine who would be free and unencumbered, who wants to live her own fastidious life; the ambitious Valentine; the dreamy, indolent one, revelling in a Land of Moonshine? But the mood passed quickly, with but a poor show of fight. In my heart was a co-ordinating medium of all conflicting desires. I was happy, and glad to be conquered by something stronger than any longing I had ever known. I thought of Suckling's words: "I hate a fool that starves her love only to feed her pride," and realised, with regret, that I had been such a fool for six wasted months. The thought was enough to make me glory in capitulation now.

Next morning came a little scrawly letter which I am not going to set down here. It is much too sacred. Nor will I confess all the foolish things it made me do—and write. The letter I wrote to my lover was absurd. But I revelled in it as deliriously as any schoolgirl, and sent it off without a qualm of shame. Shame and love are, surely, strangers to one another.

I have been looking at my new song, *Youth and*

Love, and it has made me laugh with scorn. How little such 'sweetly pretty' sentiments are akin to the real thing! Love isn't like that. It is terrible, devastating, all-consuming; it turns everything upside down, gives one a fever, a delirium, alternate hot and cold tremors. The golden dream I have written about so glibly is no more real than the dancing feet down the primrose way. Primrose way! Is it not rather the way through a fiery furnace? Yet if one wrote the truth in a song, imagine how the public would take it! I amused myself with the following version of my song:

> Youth and Love go hand in hand
> Through Gehennah's fiery land,
> Burning, freezing—ice and fire
> Alternate in wild desire.

I can see my publisher's face of horror! No; the lovers in the song must go dancing through the flowery land like a dainty shepherd and shepherdess in a Corot picture, with the primrose light behind them, and then everybody will be satisfied.

José has just been to see me and offered her congratulations in characteristic form.

"Good business, old thing!" were her first words, as she kissed me heartily. "Just fancy having you for an aunt, though; a flighty, flirty, cuddlesome bit of fluff like you! However, it might be worse. You might be my steppie—considering the way you've played that *Yeoman's Wedding*—right through to Teddy's heart. He

won't admit he's jealous, but I'm sure he is. Joking apart, Val, we're all delighted about it. I've always said there are many worse than you, only they keep 'em locked up."

I thanked her for this somewhat doubtful compliment. She laughed.

"Oh, well, you know, everyone likes you, more or less, whether you deserve it or not, and I shall miss you horribly. It's been your pose to pretend to be very selfish and all that, but you're not as bad as you make out. Uncle Dick says the real woman is something very different from the woman I know—we had quite a row about it one day, when I said you were as frivolous and flippant as me. Good old Dick! I hope you'll take his number down a bit and make him treat his niece with more respect."

"I'm afraid he'll take *my* number down," I said with a grimace. "You won't know me, Jo, when I am a good, submissive wife, loving, honouring and obeying in the proper spirit."

"No fear! I know you'll always do exactly what you like, wherever you are."

"Perhaps I shall like to obey."

She considered this a moment, then gave her blunt laugh.

"That would be funny. I can't imagine it, but one never knows."

One never knows indeed. I feel now a queer longing to obey that man in London!

V

As soon as José had gone I went to tell my precious news to the dear '*Dames de Faïence*,' for I would not have them hear it from any other lips than my own.

I found Felicity sitting by the fire alone, Bulbul coiled in a grey fluffy mass on her knees, and in her hands a book I had often seen there lately, the *Vita Nuova* in its own tongue. She made a charming picture, in the firelight and lamplight, her fair hair and delicate profile thrown upon the dark wainscot.

"Don't move," I cried, as she raised her head and prepared to get up. "Sit still—you look so lovely. I've only come to say that you were right, Felice mia."

Her kind eyes looked up into mine, a little puzzled. I threw myself on my knees beside her and buried my face in Bulbul's fur.

"When you quoted Sir John Davies to me, the other day," I went on, "you knew me better than I knew myself."

"Ah!" A light broke across her wondering face. "So you have found yourself, my Valentine, at last."

"Yes; and I find I am no wiser than Sally. We are both going to put chains round our necks."

'I am so glad, so *very* glad, my dearest." She

put both hands on my shoulders and kissed me tenderly. "I knew it would all come right. Prudence will be delighted too. I must find her and tell her the good news."

I pretended to think that her reception of my news suggested an unflattering eagerness to be rid of me, but she only laughed at that.

"Of course you know we shall miss you dreadfully," she said, "but we mustn't think of that where your happiness is concerned." She simply made my joy her own, as I knew she would; and Prudence too, when she entered a few minutes later. They were both enraptured, and kept repeating: "I am so glad—I am so glad."

"But you haven't even asked his name," I said at last.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Prudence, with twinkling eyes; "how very foolish of us, Fliss! I wonder if we have ever heard his name."

"It is Richard," I said, laughing, for I love to hear the word spoken; I say it over to myself a hundred times a day.

"We thought it might be Richard," said Felicity.

VI

Two days later I went to see him, and our interview was curiously unlike anything my imagination had pictured. Perhaps our impassioned letters had

made us feel a little shy of each other, for his first words were :

" Am I not a brute to bring the dainty creature to a hospital when she hates it so ? "

" She doesn't hate what's in it," I said.

" But there's worse to follow, when I marry her and bring her to live in this detested London, ' 'mid exhalations of dirt and smoke.' Will you come, or must I be a week-end husband and visit you at Shepherd's Delight ? "

" How can there be any delight for the shepherdess without the shepherd ? Where you are, there I want to be."

A light flashed suddenly into his languid eyes and died again, as he said, with a faint smile, for he was still very weak :

" If you really mean that, girl, signify the same in the usual way."

I did.

And all the while he never intended that we should live in London, as he told me before I left. It was not necessary, he said, and he had made up his mind to find a house in Kent or Surrey, not too far out, where I could dwell ' among lilies and roses,' according to my desire. Moreover, he did not wish me to sublet Shepherd's Delight, but to keep it as a second home till my lease expires, with Sally and her man as caretakers. He had been planning for my happiness, and I was to give up

nothing. Strange to say, this did not please me. Did he take me for a Greensleeves?

"I insist upon living in London," I said. "I know you would prefer it, and why should I not know the joy of sacrifice? I want to give up something for you, Richard. We must live in London. I won't live anywhere else."

He smiled. I wonder if that smile will be the usual response to my efforts of self-assertion. If so, I fear my husband will always have his own way.

I should like to ramble on about his convalescence and the perfect days we spent together in daffodil time; roaming through the budding woods and violet-haunted spinneys; sitting by fragrant wood fires and wrangling over books and theories. But it is time to quit my Land of Moonshine and fare forth into the unknown. What lies in wait for me, who can tell? I adventure blithely, in hope and faith.

> "The fields, the floods, the heavens, with one consent,
> Do seem to laugh on me and favour my intent."

How long will that glamour last? Will it survive the rubs and jars of daily life and domestic cares? I neither know nor care. I shall hate leaving Shepherd's Delight and knowing that Jolly will persistently uproot my marigolds and lark's-heels, red valerian, honesty, borage and all the other dear, homely things that I love. And I shall miss the

Heathers unspeakably. But if the choice had lain between staying here in my little paradise or going to the North Pole with Richard, I should be buying furs!

For God hath made us so.

THE END

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